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WORD BALLOONS

To Be Continued . . .

Well, we're back. And it's all due to *you*. Yes, **you**. You (apparently) bought our test-the-waters, really-iffy-but-why-not-try-it COMICS SCENE one-shot revival last summer. You (reportedly) liked it. But most important of all, you (really) told us so.

Assistant Publisher Milburn Smith still hasn't recovered from the deluge of letters and postcards to him, some pleading, some cajoling but all *requesting* the return of COMICS SCENE on a regular basis.

Let me just say: We're back—because *you demanded it!*

And our very special thanks for that. The editors, writers and designers of COMICS SCENE love comics. We're quite pleased to have the chance to continue exploring the field as a *quarterly* magazine, all because of you. We'll certainly do our best to provide fascinating, attractively designed articles. Of course, we're counting on you to let us know when we fail (as well as when we succeed).

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What about your local comics/SF specialty store? Is it carrying COMICS SCENE or did it sell out (and you're reading your friend's copy through that snug mylar collectors' preservative coating)? Well, there's our marvelous Marketing Director Frank Rosner. He knows his job. He knows who the X-Men are. And he'll try to help *all* direct sales accounts and distributors of STARLOG PRESS publications (like our pals at Bud Plant & Capital City) obtain enough COMICS SCENEry to satisfy 'em. See the address above.

Want to advertise? Fine by us. We actually got one reader letter requesting "*more* ads!" I was flabbergasted, too, but hey, ads pay the bills. Anyhow, Associate Publisher Rita Eisenstein has rates and specifications ready for whenever she hears from you. She's at the very same address!

Want to write for COMICS SCENE? Or are you a comics company looking for editorial coverage in the magazine? Brand-new Managing Editor Dan Dickholtz is awaiting your press material and review copies and souvenir party hats. And he's especially looking for new writers to augment our sturdy team of contributors (i.e. Eddie Berganza, David Hutchison, Pat O'Neill, Kim Howard Johnson, Will Murray, Marc Shapiro, Brian Lowry, Jessie Horsting, Hank Kanalz & former Co-Editor Carr D'Angelo). Send your published clips (as samples) and your article suggestions (with that old standard SASE). Where? To the address overhead.

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Comments, circulation, direct sales, advertising, editorial coverage, freelance submissions, back issues . . . I've detailed them all. There's just one more thing: No subscriptions are available (as of yet) for COMICS SCENE. Sorry.

In the meantime, we're preparing *three* more issues of COMICS SCENE for publication this year. Yes, we'll be here, all together—and awfully crowded—at the address above.

—David McDonnell/Editor

COMICS SCENE RETURNS in just a few months with further explorations of the comics scene and the comics screen. Look for fascinating visits with **Superman** artist **Jerry Ordway** and **Wild Dog** writer **Max Allan Collins**. . . exhaustive profiles of Marvel & DC's revolutionary new weekly comics . . . intimate views of the **George Lucas-Ron Howard** saga **Willow** and the **Robert Zemeckis-Steven Spielberg-Walt Disney** animation/live-action thriller **Who Framed Roger Rabbit?**. . . and exclusive news of those upcoming movies, **The Wizard of Id** and **The Batman**. **COMICS SCENE #3 goes on sale May 3, 1988.**

COMICS SCENE

Wolverine will be walking into weekly wonderment in what Claremont says is "like a Saturday afternoon serial."

Wolverine Art: John Buscema & Klaus Janson
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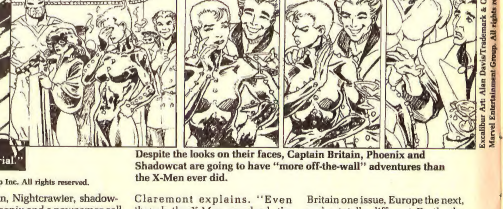
Pulling "Excalibur" & the Mutants from the Stone



Despite the looks on their faces, Captain Britain, Phoenix and Shadowcat are going to have "more off-the-wall" adventures than the X-Men ever did.

Excalibur Art: Alan Davis/Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group. All rights reserved.

The aftermath of the "Fall of the Mutants" storyline has led to two new series at Marvel, and a major overhaul in a long-standing title, according to scripter Chris Claremont.

Excalibur, drawn by Alan Davis, follows the adventures of a team of heroes and mutants in England—Captain Britain, his girl friend Meggan, Nightcrawler, shadowcat, Phoenix and a newcomer called Widget—who group together as a response to the presumed death of the X-Men. "The rationale is that the X-Men were the embodiment of Professor Xavier's dream, in the same way that the Knights of the Round Table embodied King Arthur's dream," Claremont explains. "Even though the X-Men are dead, the dream can be kept alive through a symbol, perhaps. Excalibur was the symbol of Arthur's rule and his dream, so the new Excalibur team is the symbol of Xavier's dream."

Claremont calls the book a "cosmic comedy caper," a title where the team could be in Great Britain one issue, Europe the next, and a totally different Earth, the third. "Hopefully, it will be more intentionally funny than the *X-Men*—as opposed to unintentionally funny, which is a whole different kettle of fish," he observes. "In a sense, the *X-Men* has always been a darkly oriented, grim, serious title. *Excalibur* will drop it, that it's not important. They start disavowing any connection whatsoever, and that makes him a trifle suspicious. Finally, he is labeled a traitor and all of his former friends are ordered to track Nick Fury down and exterminate with extreme prejudice.

"It has all the James Bondian elements that the old series had. It starts out in Nevada and ends up in space. It has Hydra, AIM, LMDs and the Infinity Formula. It has Nick Fury's car, all the old SHIELD agents and all the new ones, what's left of the Helicarrier and cameos by such people as Tony Stark and the Avengers. It has *everything* I think *should* be in a SHIELD book."

Says Mark Gruenwald, "We're really trying to account for the direction of the organization, deal with it and tear down what was in order to make SHIELD a healthy hero organization for the '90s."

—*Daniel Dickholtz*

His Name is Fury, Nick Fury

Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD no longer?

SHIELD Art: Paul Neary & Kim DeMulder/Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group. All rights reserved.

Is Nick Fury really a traitor to the cause? Or is the very superspy organization that he has led all these years the actual threat to national security? It depends on which agent you contact in *SHIELD*, a new six-part, bookshelf format mini-series written by Bob Harras, drawn by Paul Neary and Kim DeMulder. The covers are by classic *SHIELD* artist Jim Steranko.

"We tried to hit upon all the nifty people, places and things that were components of the original *Strange Tales* and the Steranko issues of Fury's own series, plus account for all the '70s and '80s additions, which is when writers tended to play it as a covert operation that didn't have the public's welfare in mind," says editor Mark Gruenwald. "The whole point was to fully address with a degree of finality why there was corruption in SHIELD all this time and deal with it in a positive way and in an entertaining story."

From the moment Marvel began producing mini-series, Gruenwald observes, their offices had been swamped with suggestions from Roger Stern, Frank Miller, Larry Hama, Tom DeFalco and many other creators for ways to revive the old favorite. However, it was under the current team that a 12-part limited series was announced in 1985. Delays prompted by mini-series gluts and the introduction of the New Universe titles, though, have produced what the editor has seen as "two years of improvement" and notes that with the new format and its "gritty, film noir approach, the world is ready for *SHIELD*.

"One of Nick's sleeper agents discovers a connection between SHIELD and the Roxxon Corporation," Gruenwald explains. "When Fury asks his superiors, the Executive Board of Directors, what the heck is going on, he's told to

be a little more off-the-wall, with a more English flavor, I hope. The style we're going for is classic John Steed-Emma Peel *Avengers* episodes. There will be dynamic and scary villains, and exciting, suspenseful stories. Still, no matter how exciting and suspenseful, they will always have a twist that will skew them just off mainstream. And we plan, as well, some hysterically funny stories with a serious twist."

Despite what the members of Excalibur — and many others in the Marvel universe—believe, the X-Men are not dead. They are, however, changing direction.

"The X-Men are making a shift from heroes into legends," Claremont says. "They are taking a much more active role, no longer waiting for villains to make the first move. They figure that if the stakes are high enough, the situation is dire enough, then they must take a more aggressive stance."

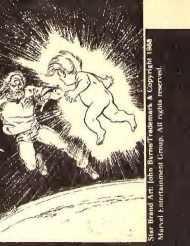
And, while many "normal" humans are now more comfortable with mutants in their midst, Claremont says prejudice towards them has not been eliminated. "As in any other situation involving martyr-like death, there are those who have been changed by the 'Fall of the Mutants' storyline, who have altered their opinion of mutants in a favorable direction. But, there are others who have not. The fight will go on. This is a watershed, but the trouble with watersheds is that there's always damage and picking up to do."

The second new series, illustrated by John Buscema and Klaus Janson, is a solo adventure for Wolverine, which will run as the lead feature in the upcoming weekly *Marvel Universe* title. Claremont says readers will find a noticeable shift in his writing style there. "One advantage to the weekly 8-page installment is that there is less need for the sort of mandatory major recap we do every issue in X-Men: 'These are the X-Men. These are their powers, their backgrounds, blah blah blah . . .' he points out. "With the weekly schedule, you establish a certain amount of status quo, but always with the assumption that it has only been a week since the last issue, and the reader will pick it up as he goes along. It's a much leaner style. You can establish things in issue #1, and you don't have to re-establish them in every succeeding issue. In addition, it's not an ongoing series, just a 10-issue run. It's a self-contained 80-page story, sort of like a Saturday afternoon serial. Bearing in mind it will be repackaged as a totality, you don't want a complete recap every eight pages."

—*Patrick Daniel O'Neill*

Twinkle, Twinkle Little "Star Brand"

"What I want to do with *The Star Brand* is the idea of literally passing it on to the next person," notes writer/penciller John Byrne. "When you give the Star Brand to somebody, you are left with 10 percent of what you started with. The Old Man was starting at infinity, so he put 90 percent of that into Connell. Connell tried to get rid of that and that's how *The Pitt* happened. Then, Connell will try to put what he's left with into different people. Duck is pregnant and *the kid* is going to have the power."



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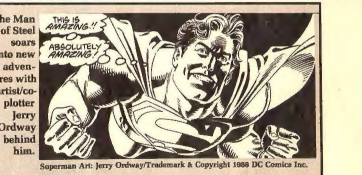
After that, says Byrne, "I'm going to mess with the readers' heads. If I can make a comics fan squirm in the afternoon, I sleep better."



The Man of Steel soars into new adventures with artist/co-plotter Jerry Ordway behind him.

Superman Art: Jerry Ordway/Trademark & Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.

Mr. "Adventures"

There are a couple of sub-plots involving Brainiac coming up in the Superman books," notes *Adventures of Superman* artist and co-plotter Jerry Ordway. "Each issue, Brainiac's changing more and eventually, he will become more of an android character, closer to the original.

"Morgan Edge has launched a publicity campaign against Superman, and another hero, more in the vein of Batman, will be spinning off of this storyline for a few issues. Also, there's a good subplot involving Jimmy's mother, but I don't want to give that away."

As for working with John Byrne, Ordway says, "I'm extremely pleased that John has been very receptive to my ideas. Whenever I think of an idea, I'll call up John, or he'll call me, and we'll talk it over. Things have worked out very well. Now I'm looking forward, not to the past. I'm looking forward to doing even better work."

—*Hank Kanalz*

George Wunder, "Terry" Writer-Artist, 1912-1987

Writer/artist George Wunder worked wonders in the world of *Terry and the Pirates*.

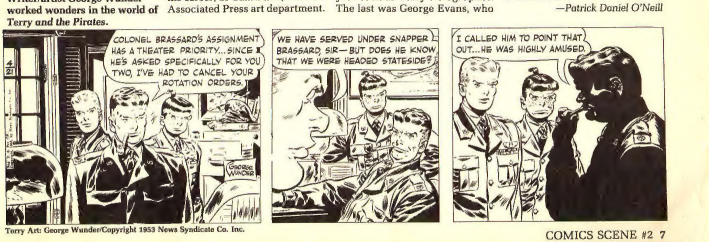
George Wunder, the comic strip writer and artist who took over the reins of *Terry and the Pirates* after Milton Caniff left, died in December at age 75.

Wunder accepted the difficult assignment of following Caniff in 1947, when the *Terry* creator began his *Steve Canyon* comic strip. Wunder had spent the early part of his career, as Caniff had, with the Associated Press art department. Originally, Wunder kept the strip in Caniff's milieu, the Far East, but as the focus of world attention shifted, Terry Lee's Air Force career took him to wherever the action was—including posts in Australia, the Middle East, and finally, with Air Force Intelligence as a roving agent.

A number of artists worked alongside Wunder during his 26-year stint as Terry's biographer. The last was George Evans, who was drawing the strip over Wunder's scripts in 1973, when Lt. Col. Terry Lee signed off the comics pages because of Wunder's ill health.

Though it is Caniff's version of *Terry* that is constantly collected and reprinted, for those of us who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, it is Wunder's work that will be fondly remembered.

—*Patrick Daniel O'Neill*


COLONEL BRASSARD'S ASSIGNMENT HAS A THEATER PRIORITY... SINCE HE'S ASKED SPECIFICALLY FOR YOU TWO, I'VE HAD TO CANCEL YOUR ROTATION ORDERS.
GENERAL HANDER
WE HAVE SERVED UNDER SNAPPER BRASSARD, SIR— BUT DOES HE KNOW THAT WE WERE HEADED STATESIDE?
I CALLED HIM TO POINT THAT OUT... HE WAS HIGHLY AMUSED.

Terry Art: George Wunder/Copyright 1953 News Syndicate Co. Inc.

Death, Death & More Death

Iron Man Art: Butch Guice & Bob Layton/Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group. All rights reserved.

Scripter David Michelinie has been musing morbidly of late. While readers of *The Amazing Spider-Man* (see page 30) have nothing to worry about, faithful followers of his other work may be a little surprised at Michelinie's death wishes.

For example, as far as the armored avenger is concerned, the writer notes that in issue #230, "Iron Man *dies*. He's nuked. But #231 is actually a very important issue. It's the *new* Iron Man.

"This is not to say Tony Stark dies," he confesses, "but Iron Man does. After putting him through all this grief [in the Armor Wars storyline], the logical conclusion was to have him emerge as a new person, a new Iron Man, with new armor. From now on, it will be Tony Stark in the armor, but no one will know it except Stark and Jim Rhodes. To the world at large, there is a totally new person inside it."

Admitting that the old suit made Stark look "just too much like a Transformer," Michelinie and artist Bob Layton have decided to give the mechanistic marvel something that is "more streamlined. The shoulder pads are gone, the huge neck-collar thing is gone. It is going to be closer to the earlier red and gold costume than to the silver one. It will be state of the art, with lots of nifty stuff in it."

Following Iron Man's overhaul "is a fill-in issue by Barry Windsor-Smith that's an epilogue to the Armor Wars stories. Completely different from the plot I sent, but it's great so I can't complain," the writer laughs. "In April, Jackson Guice takes over on pencils [Layton will continue to ink], and we are starting some new directions. In May, Spider-Man guest-stars, one of the *only* times it has actually been easy to coordinate a crossover."

Whenever he has not been plotting the "death" of one of Marvel's firmly established characters, Michelinie has kept busy devising new ways to put an end to one of his own. Aided and abetted by penciller Steve Burcell, the scripter keeps trying to write "fini" to the hero of *Hero*, an upcoming three-part bookshelf format mini-series.

"It deals with a self-centered, megeneration security courier from Hoboken, New Jersey, who on page six of the first chapter dies," Michelinie notes. "He's blown up by a terrorist bomb, but instead of going to heaven or hell, he ends up on a sword-and-sorcery fantasy world called Peregrine Magi. He finds himself pressed into going against the evil rulers of this world. He goes along and about chapter three, he dies again! He wakes up on another world, here are the same guys going, 'We have to fight the bad guys,' and he's saying, 'Wait a minute! What the hell's going on?!' I don't want to go into details, but what I had in mind was 'John Carter of Mars meets Indiana Jones.'"

And just as the characters he is currently working on keep discovering new ways of returning to this mortal coil, one of his past creations may be resurrected.

"Contrary to what you may have read, *The Bozz Chronicles* was *not* cancelled. I turned down the renewal contract because I had problems with the Epic editorial office," Michelinie reveals. However, "Greg Wright, who is the assistant editor on *Iron Man*, wants to edit a *Bozz* graphic novel, and he is talking to the associate editor, Mark Gruenwald, about the possibility. Things look fairly good. There may actually be more *Bozz* in the foreseeable future."

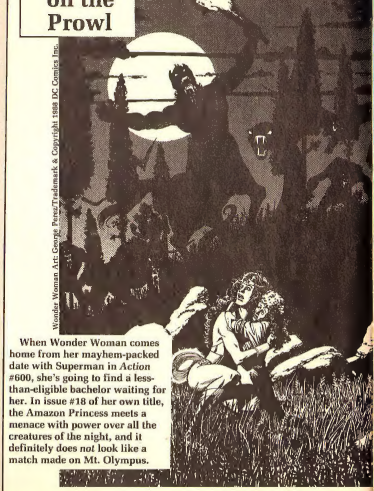
–Daniel Dickholtz

Captain America Art: Kieron Dwyer & Al Milgrom/Trademark & Copyright 1988 Marvel Entertainment Group. All rights reserved.

O Captain, My Captains

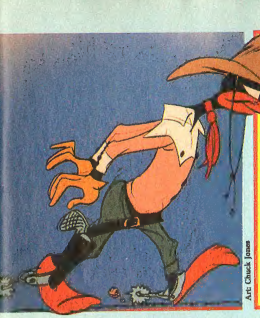
"I currently have two *Captain America* storylines going on," explains scripter Mark Gruenwald, "one with the new Captain America and his partner Battlestar, formerly Bucky, trying to live up to the legend, and then I have the old Captain and his team of ex-partners, Nomad, Falcon and D-Man, not to mention Vagabond, who stands around and does nothing for the longest time. These two plotlines will converge and pave the way for issue #350. Many of the elements going on will be resolved, but I don't think we're going to give you what you expect."

Creatures on the Prowl



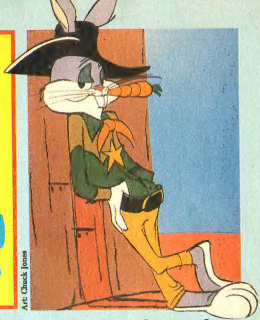
Wonder Woman Art: Gregg Perez/Trademark & Copyright 1988 DC Comics Inc.

When Wonder Woman comes home from her mayhem-packed date with Superman in *Action* #600, she's going to find a less-than-eligible bachelor waiting for her. In issue #18 of her own title, the Amazon Princess meets a menace with power over all the creatures of the night, and it definitely does *not* look like a match made on Mt. Olympus.



Keeping Up With Chuck Jones

By BRIAN LOWRY



Still singing Looney Tunes, the beloved animation legend confesses how the Grinch stole Christmas and why he helped frame Roger Rabbit.

Recently, on a holiday weekend, a British television station showed 10 half-hours of Chuck Jones cartoons. Remarkably, between 2.5 and 4 million viewers tuned in to the festival, dubbed *What's Up, Chuck?*

Jones, who has just completed an as-yet untitled biography, initially thought it might make a fitting handle for the book, then thought better of it. "That's all right in England, because 'upchuck' doesn't mean the same thing," he notes wryly. "Right now, I call the book *The Road Runner, the Egg and I*, but I don't know."

The self-effacing, gentle humor is only one of the trademarks of Jones, a man who seems like a college professor yet who built a reputation directing cartoons that many, naively, think were made just for children. However, as Jones and any of his Warner Brothers would quickly tell you, the target audience wasn't youngsters, but themselves, and the funny bones they felt it most important to tickle—to be true to their work and to themselves—were their own.

Not surprisingly, then, the Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Road Runner cartoons that flourished in the 1930s, '40s and '50s became more than just children's fare. Many have been taken to heart by today's most prestigious filmmakers, considered six-minute gems to be studied and treasured.

Jones himself has become treasured in a similar fashion. He spends much of his time today lecturing and receiving various awards—which, he would have no problem telling you, is a function of both appreciation of his work and living long enough to take in the often-belated applause.

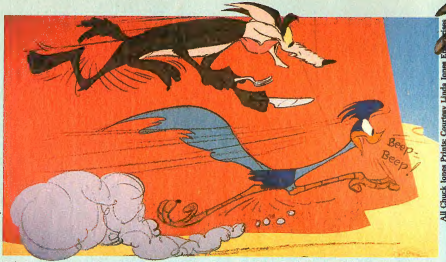
Many filmmakers have included tributes to Jones in their films, be it Steven Spielberg using clips from *Duck Dodgers in the 24½ Century* in *Close Encounters* to the cameos Jones has essayed in Joe Dante's films, the most recent being a supermarket checkout line customer in *Innerspace*. (Jones, perhaps fortuitously, was unavailable for *Explorers*, so Dante simply named the school "Charles M. Jones Junior High.")

Yet despite being well into his 70s, Jones (previously interviewed in STARLOG #108) is nevertheless active and sought after. His talents, in fact, have even been tapped by Spielberg and

Photo: David Hutchison

Chuck & Linda Jones celebrate their very animated lives at a NYC reception held at T.R.'s Gallery.

Robert Zemeckis as a consultant on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, a live-action animated epic based on the Gary Wolf novel that blends Disney's cartoon characters with those of Warner Bros., MGM and Max & Dave Fleischer.



Art: Chuck Jones

"The Road Runner," explains Jones, "is the Coyote's Holy Grail. He's just trying to get something to eat."

All Chuck Jones Prints: Courtesy Linda Jones Enterprises

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"I was really hired just to let them know how to handle the Warner Bros. characters," Jones comments, minimizing his involvement. "They really just play cameo roles, as I understand it."

Jones, in fact, worked with Zemeckis in planning an eagerly awaited sequence in which two of the screen's most-famous fowls—Donald Duck and Daffy Duck—appear together playing dual pianos. "It's a funny idea," Jones says. "I hope that stays in."

As he recalls it, Jones and the other Warner animators were fascinated by Disney's feature approach to animation but similarly downplayed their own work. "I never thought of the Disney characters at all," he says. "None of us did. It never even occurred to us that we were in the same business. If there was such a comparison, we thought we were doing Model T Fords while they were doing Ferraris.

"We never really were in competition with anybody, even with each other—the reason for that being because of what I called 'the jam session,' where other writers and directors would fire ideas at your premise. The result was it was almost impossible to feel yourself in competition with someone when you were helping them."

The Warner Bros. fraternity, when Jones joined it in the 1930s and '40s, included such memorable names as Bob Clampett, Tex Avery, Michael Maltese and Friz Freleng. Clampett, however, left the studio in 1946, shortly after Avery moved to MGM.

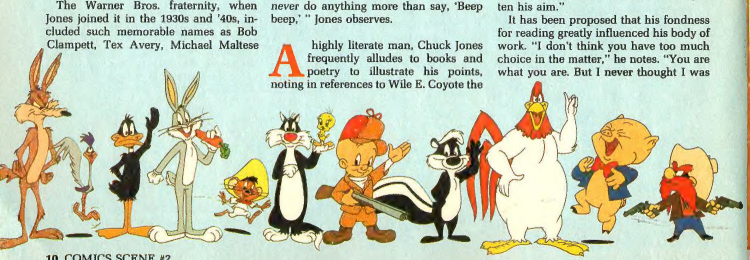
Jones worked his way up from the bottom, washing cels before becoming an animator and, eventually, a director. "Tex had a magnificent sense of timing, as did Friz," he recalls. "I animated for both of them, so I learned a great deal about timing, though I didn't utilize it the same way they did. Tex and Clampett were less concerned with personality in their characters than with [funny] business."

While Avery and Clampett created Bugs Bunny, for example, it was Jones who defined the character and gave him the personality that endures to this day. Clampett, in fact, only did four Bugs Bunny cartoons and curiously enough, Avery only did three or four. "He didn't really understand [Bugs]," Jones notes. "If you look at the second one he made, 'Tortoise Meets Hare,' Bugs is an absolute patsy. The turtle won all the battles and Bugs ends up looking like a fool."

Jones learned things also as he went along. In the Road Runner cartoon series, for example, the first installment has the Road Runner picking up a manhole cover and letting the Coyote run into it. "I realized immediately that that was wrong, that the Road Runner should never do anything more than say, 'Beep beep,' " Jones observes.

A highly literate man, Chuck Jones frequently alludes to books and poetry to illustrate his points, noting in references to Wile E. Coyote the line: "A fanatic is somebody who redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim."

It has been proposed that his fondness for reading greatly influenced his body of work. "I don't think you have too much choice in the matter," he notes. "You are what you are. But I never thought I was



"He's a heroic character," observes Jones of the Acme-clad Wile E. Coyote. "I admire him because he keeps trying all the time."

Daffy meets another famous waterfowl, Donald—not this wooden stunt-double—in the upcoming *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*

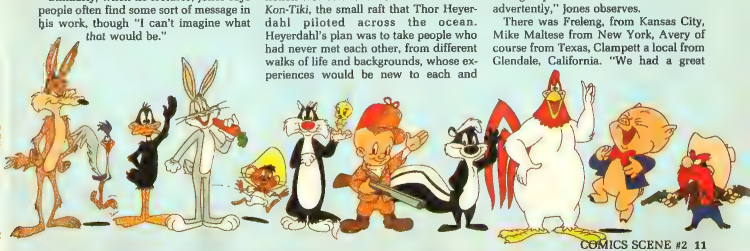
Art: Chuck Jones

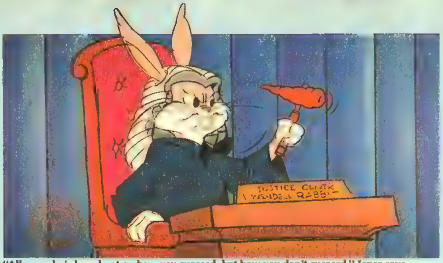
doing anything that would benefit mankind."

Similarly, when he lectures, Jones says people often find some sort of message in his work, though "I can't imagine what *that* would be."

Nevertheless, Jones finds plenty of allusions between both literary and nonfiction worlds and his own life. Take the *Kon-Tiki*, the small raft that Thor Heyerdahl piloted across the ocean. Heyerdahl's plan was to take people who had never met each other, from different walks of life and backgrounds, whose experiences would be new to each and whose stories and jokes would all be fresh. "What Heyerdahl did intellectually, the group at Warner Bros did inadvertently," Jones observes.

There was Freleng, from Kansas City, Mike Maltese from New York, Avery of course from Texas, Clampett a local from Glendale, California. "We had a great





Art: Chuck Jones

"All comedy is based not on how you succeed, but how you don't succeed," Jones says.

deal to offer each other because we came from such different backgrounds."

One thing all the animators shared was a delight in characterization. They made their characters suffer for art. "What we looked for was not how to do things right, but how to do things *wrong*. That was the absolute: It's about *not* catching a Road Runner, or *not* getting a girl, in Pepe LePew's case," he remarks. "That's the basis of all comedy. All comedy is based not on how you succeed, but how you *don't* succeed.

"Also, comedy is always based on trivial pursuits, and we used that phrase before the game did. It's about getting a girl, or getting something to eat—always simple things."

Simply speaking, there's Jones' literate, updated, post-facto description of Bugs Bunny: "If you took Rex Harrison playing Professor Higgins (from *My Fair Lady*), D'Artagnan and Dorothy Parker and stuffed them in a rabbitskin, you would have Bugs."

While Bugs has been the most enduring character, Jones also put his stamp on Daffy Duck, directing the three Bugs-Daffy team-ups of the '50s, and such memorable one-shots as "One Froggy Evening," where a multi-talented amphibian, Michigan J. Frogg, drives a man to ruin.

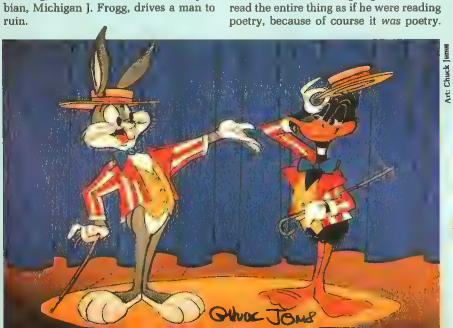
Jones is equally proud, however, of some of the work he did after leaving Warner Bros., including such specials as *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, *The Cricket in Times Square* and *Riki Tiki-Tavi*.

As to *Grinch*, Jones had to convince Dr. Seuss, with whom he had worked before World War II, to allow him to adapt the character. "I had to go down there and persuade him because he had some unfortunate experiences before the war," Jones recalls. "He was kind of off on Hollywood, but I told him if he didn't like the storyboards, he could back out of it."

Jones sold Seuss, but then had to find sponsors to support the show, and at first, the prospects were as cold as the Grinch's heart. He recalls making "20 to 25 presentations" to prospective clients before he found one who would buy it."

One of the great coups of that production involved the vocal casting of Boris Karloff. "Many people didn't realize Karloff had this magnificent speaking voice. He had done a lot of wonderful children's programming on records, though I don't believe that good programming for children is ever 'children's programming,' " notes Jones.

"I told Karloff I was going to have him read the entire thing as if he were reading poetry, because of course it *was* poetry. Then, what I did for the Grinch was take the highs out, creating a more gravelly voice. That gave a kind of rhythm to it. I didn't want two different people reading those lines."



Art: Chuck Jones

A longtime critic of the current state of animation, Jones now believes that it's "healthier than it was a few years ago."

To illustrate that contention, Jones points to Don Bluth, now working on features at full steam, and the young cadre of Disney animators who created *The Great Mouse Detective*, "a wonderful picture," Jones says approvingly. "The villain, Ratigan, was just a brilliant piece of animation, and then at the end, they blended the characters with computer animation on the clock, which is a pretty good example of what they can do."

Still, Jones stresses that the computer will *never* capture character, the element he believes is sorely lacking from the numerous cartoons produced today for network television and syndication.

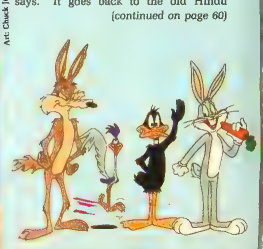
"The thing that's terribly important about all animation is that animated characters are seldom funny to look at," he opines. "Our characters and Disney characters and Tom and Jerry were not funny to look at, it was what they *did* that made them funny.

"In [new cartoons], they try to draw them funny, and they're not even funnily drawn. That's what I like about Ralph Bakshi [now doing *Mighty Mouse* for Saturday morning]. He used voices that didn't apply to the characters and made the movements funny, even with the obvious restrictions.

"Bakshi has brought some fun to it. He loves animators, and I like *anybody* who loves animators. That's the heart of our business. Being a director is fine, but it comes down to animating, and I worked with some great ones."

In the good ol' days at Warner Bros., Jones relates, animators would never reuse footage—a common cost-saving practice among today's cartoon producers—even of a character walking. "We learned a lot by assuming that *any* action would be different from another," he says. "It goes back to the old Hindu

(continued on page 60)



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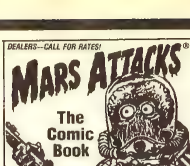

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Under the Moons of Mongo

Aside from a friendly lionman and tons of trouble, Flash and Dale also pick up the latest in Mongo fashions, outfits with the same "romantic feel" Alex Raymond gave them.

Thanks to Dan Jurgens, Flash Gordon will be meeting a more modern—but still merciless—Ming.

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

Into the Third Dimension!

Long regarded as one of the finest science-fiction comic strip adventurers of all time, Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* enters a new dimension this spring.

Distributed by Renegade Press, *Flash Gordon 3-D* reprints 30 Sunday pages from 1936, representing a sequence titled "The Water World of Mongo." Ray Zone, the originator of this new look at an old hero, is a Los Angeles-based publisher who specializes in classic 3-D comic re-issues and new 3-D editions of the work of legendary artists.

"When I first contacted King Features about converting *Flash Gordon* to 3-D," begins Zone, "I was told that they had just licensed it to Marvel for their *Defenders of the Earth* book. In the meantime, I did George

WAY TO GO, ARDEN! FOR A WOMAN REPORTER, YOU'VE GOT LOT OF GUTS!
AHH! DO YOU MAKE REPORTERS SOUND SO DEROGATORY?
HATE 'EM! WIMPY, WHINY REPORTERS HAVE BEEN SUCKING UP TO ME EVER SINCE I WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL.

Cartoon Art: Dan Jurgens & Chuck Patterson/Courtesy DC Comics

We're redoing the original *Flash Gordon* story in modern dress," says Dan Jurgens, currently writing and pencilling the nine-issue limited series for DC Comics. "The series begins with Flash, Dale Arden and Dr. Zarkov on Earth, and becomes a story of their journey to the planet Mongo and their adventures there.

"The original story had Mongo as a threat to Earth, with that as the reason for the trip. I have dropped that aspect be-

Ray Zone relies on graphic symbolism rather than images of Flash and Dale for the cover.

Herriman's *Krazy Kat*. King Features was very pleased with it, so that when I brought up *Flash Gordon* again many months later, they immediately gave me the go-ahead."

King Features Syndicate no longer owns any of the original Raymond art, so Zone had to rely on published sources. "I looked through the Nostalgia Press book and selected 'The Water World of Mongo' as the story that was most appropriate for 3-D effects and that showed off Alex Raymond at the very top of his form. The rendering techniques he used at that time are unsurpassed in graphic storytelling.

"The episode begins with an 'Our Story Thus Far' panel, which sets up the reader for the sequence of events just as it did in the 1930s. 'The Water World of Mongo' has a beginning, middle and end, but it's still just an excerpt from the episodic panorama that constitutes the *Flash Gordon* stories."

From the surface world of Mongo and into the depths of the sea, Flash plunges into three- dimensional adventures.

MING'S AIR FLEET APPROACHES THE UNDERSEA CITY OF CORALIA
THE CITY IS LOCATED THEIR CITY IS JUST AS WE EXPECTED!
SHALL WE RE-RAISE THE SUPER-DEPTH?
BORED, CAPTAIN!

Ray Zone is making every effort to preserve the original format of the Sunday strips, which originally covered 2/3 of the newspaper page. The Zonevision 3-D edition will print the panels horizontally across the spread, instead of the traditional vertical comic-book page format. "I think it will be more interesting that way, since it will involve the reader's peripheral vision a bit more," notes Zone.

The four-color cover is a montage of a "very sexy lady," smiles Zone, "and a rocketship. Flash and Dale do *not* appear on the cover. I thought the rocketship seeming to appear out of the

INSIDE THE PLANET NO, WRECKED SHIP, ZARKOV BATTLES THE CONTROLS . . .
OH, POOR DARLING!
IF WE CAN ONLY LAND IN THE FOREST
THIS IS THE END, FLASH!

The suspense deepens when Ray Zone explores the full depth of Alex Raymond's art.

woman's gestures was a very interesting subliminal symbol for science fiction in the 14-year-old mind . . . You know, sex and rocketships," he laughs.

Flash Gordon 3-D will be 32 pages in length, printed on Baxter paper, with four-color covers and two pairs of 3-D glasses. It will sell for $2.50 and be distributed to the direct market by Renegade Press.

—*David Hutchison*

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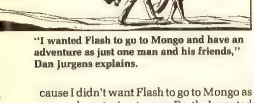
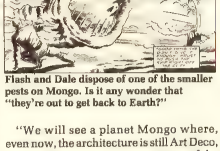


"I wanted Flash to go to Mongo and have an adventure as just one man and his friends," Dan Jurgens explains.



Flash and Dale dispose of one of the smaller pests on Mongo. Is it any wonder that "they're out to get back to Earth?"

cause I didn't want Flash to go to Mongo as a superhero trying to save Earth. I wanted him to go to Mongo and have an adventure as just one man and his friends. That gives it a more human scale—they're not out to save Earth, they're out to *get back* to Earth."

Most limited series run four issues, six issues, or 12 issues. Why a *nine*-issue run for *Flash Gordon*? "I have a personal feeling that a 12-issue maxi-series, with a few exceptions, always hits a point around the seventh or eighth issue where it usually starts to sag," Jurgens explains. "I decided to try and defeat that by going to nine issues." Bruce Patterson is inking Jurgens' pencils on the Mike Gold-edited series, which debuts this month.

The *raison d'etre* for Flash, Dale and Zarkov's interplanetary journey has changed, but what about Mongo itself? Is it still the world that Alex Raymond designed some 50 years ago? "I've tried to pick up on the flavor of Raymond's work," Jurgens replies. "His stuff was incredibly beautiful, and it was a matter of taking a look at it and picking out that which still holds up today.

"We will see a planet Mongo where, even now, the architecture is still Art Deco, because that was an important part of the story in the 1930s. However, if we look at the rocketships that Raymond designed, we see them today as silly. The difference between now and 50 years ago is that man has learned how to fly in space. In general, the original's architecture and aesthetics have been preserved, but the technology has been updated."

And that technology is firmly in the hands of a single man—Ming the Merciless, emperor of Mongo. "Mongo is still a world, where, despite having rayguns, people prefer to fight with swords—and we've come up with a reason *why*," Jurgens notes. "As I read the old Raymond strips, I found that there was no reason for Flash to want to overthrow Ming. Mongo was really not all that bad a place to live. Certainly, we have governments on Earth that are worse than Ming's. I decided to create a world where Ming is *really* the absolute ruler.

"This time around, Ming controls *all* of the technology," the writer/artist notes. "All the other societies, outside the capital, have only the technology that Ming allows them to have. Ming has the *only* army and the *only* flying craft. That explains things like the swordplay. Ming even controls the technology that allows the floating city of the Hawkmen to stay in the air."

That's not the only change in Mongo's politics that Jurgens has made. He wants

(continued on page 67)

An updated Dale and Flash encounter a far more merciless Ming and a perfectly good reason for using swords on a world that also has laser-guns.

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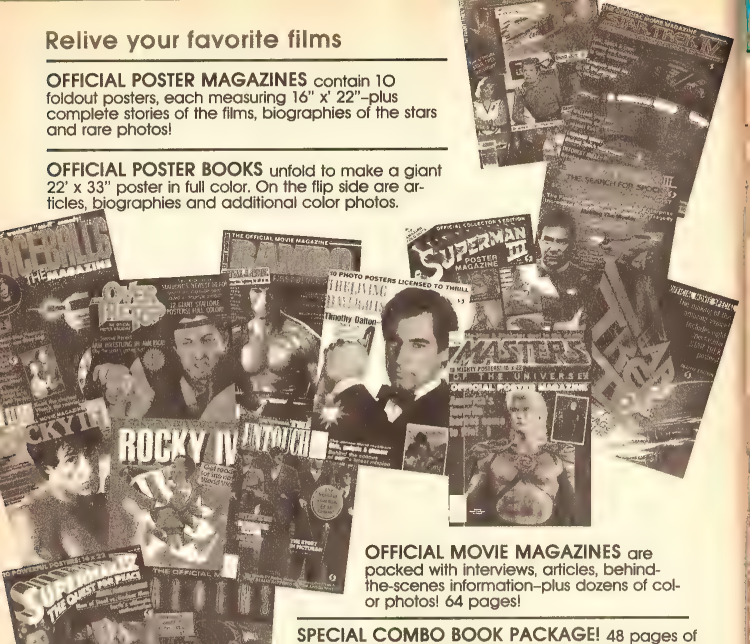

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By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

Spotlight on THE SHADOW LINE SAGA™

D.G. Chichester and Margaret Clark illuminate the myths and mysteries behind Epic's first interrelated trio of titles.

The basic idea behind creating the Shadow Line is to give Epic an identity," says Margaret Clark, co-writer of the new series of three titles, as well as Epic's managing editor.

"Everything about the Shadow Line books was [Epic editor-in-chief] Archie Goodwin's idea," reveals Clark's writing partner D.G. (Dan) Chichester. "Archie came up with the background, the concepts for each of the characters. He wrote it all up in a 30-page bible, along with suggestions about the directions in which the various series might go."

Neither writer is an old pro in the comics field — in fact, the three Shadow Line titles represent their *first* regular assignments as scripters. Both have, however, been editing at Epic for several years. Clark began her comics career as Jim Shooter's administrative assistant. From there, she moved to a post as assistant editor at Epic, eventually achieving her current position after a stint as associate editor. "In the five years I've been at Marvel," she laughs, "I've gone from answering the phone when freelancers call to calling *them* with assignments."

Chichester's move into the editorial office was equally fortunate. "When I was at NYU studying film, my final film project left me broke, penniless, with no money," he recalls. To meet the bills, he took a job as an editorial assistant, then moved into the Epic offices as an assistant editor. He is now the associate editor.

So, how did two such tyros nail down what seems like a fairly prestigious assignment? "Shortly after Archie locked down all the final concepts, he asked the two of us — out of the blue — to be the writers," Chichester explains. "We've never asked him specifically, 'Why us?' but we think a large part of it is that we're right there in the office, and if he thinks the series needs a change, or wants to make suggestions, we're close by. In addition, we have done some inventory work that he had seen and liked, particularly a story for *Justice* that scrapped all the concepts that Steve Engelhart had grafted onto that character and went back to what Archie had set up when he created it. That may have impressed Archie that the direction we would choose would closely match his for these books."

"He did want a *single* writer for all three books," Clark notes. "That's a little frightening for somebody who already has a regular assignment; he or she would have to give it up for this new, untried idea.

Asked how the two split up the writing chores, Chichester laughs, "I pick up the consonants and she buys the vowels. Basically, whenever one of us gets up from the computer, the other dashes over, puts in what he or she wants, and erases everything else." But seriously, he says, "Margaret's actually very good at character, at what motivates someone to do things. I'm much better at the set pieces and action bits, the plot elements that push the whole story forward."

Cover Art: Bill Sienkiewicz

Man's ability to destroy the world forces Dr. Zero to step "Out of the Darkness."

Chichester reports that all three Shadow Line titles — *Doctor Zero*, *Power Line* and *St. George* — exist in one coherent world. "The basic premise is that, in a world not terribly unlike our own, there is a parallel race of Shadow Dwellers, who look and act human," he explains. "They developed on a parallel evolutionary scale with humanity, but in far smaller numbers. As an

arbitrary figure, for every 1,000 humans, there might be one Shadow Dweller. They've developed better bone structure, tighter muscle fiber, faster reflexes and a longer life span—as long as they don't have children. Making a conscious choice to have a child begins a biological clock ticking that reverts them to a human life span. If they have a second child, it accelerates that clock. Their brains also produce an electrochemical reaction that gives each of them a specific ability, that they are either born with or develop later. Their range of powers is in the psychic area—telekinesis, telepathy, empathy."

"The Shadow Dwellers have always existed with man, but have become part of his myths and legends," Clark continues. "Vampires, zombies, the Greek gods—these were all Shadow Dwellers. For their own survival, they remain hidden."

"They might even have a nine-to-five job," adds Chichester. "The person right next to you might be a Shadow Dweller, but you won't know it because he'll reach for the glass, not have it levitate to him. The nomadic Dwellers, those who have never had children, hide their long life spans by drifting from place to place. Those with children settle down and live 'normal' lives. Some don't relate with humans at all; the monks of St. George live in a monastery on a mesa, with very little contact with normal humanity."

Under Uncle Ripley's guidance, two young Shadow Dwellers set up the *Power Line*.

The first Shadow Line book is *Doctor Zero*," Clark notes. Denys Cowan is pencilling the title with Bill Sienkiewicz inking. "Zero is sort of a stone dropped in a pond—what he does causes ripples throughout the Shadow Line universe. His appearance on the scene—going public with his powers—ignites the chain reaction that causes the creation of Power Line and St. George."

"Zero is ageless, even by Shadow Dweller standards," Chichester comments. "He has always been here, and considers that he always should be. He sees himself as the king of the Shadow Dwellers. The humans are only animals, so he's king of them, too. Because he has been around so long, and can draw mental energy from humans *and* Shadow Dwellers, he has a power base that has allowed him to develop many abilities, whereas most of his kind have only one.

"When the series begins, he sees that humanity has developed the power to destroy the world. He doesn't want the world destroyed because he views it as *his* property, and so he presents himself as a hero in order to manipulate world events to his own ends. It may seem he's doing something very heroic, while at the same time he's planning a covert assassination in South America, or something.

"Denys Cowan refers to Zero as 'that rat fink,'" laughs Chichester. "Denys says he finds himself drawing a panel in which Zero looks great and heroic, and suddenly he'll say, 'What am I doing? This guy's a devil!'"

"Although Zero is not crazy about humanity, he is trying to stop nuclear Armageddon and terrorism," Clark points out.

"What he's doing isn't bad. He's not like

All Powerline Art: David Ross & Bob McCleod

They don't realize it, but the Power Line kids together have the might to rival Dr. Zero.

Dr. Doom, who wants to take over the world," Chichester says. "Zero already thinks he's in charge, and he wants to make sure the children don't destroy the playground."

"It's only in the last sequence of the first issue that Zero's motivations become clear," reveals Clark. "The reader will begin to wonder, 'What exactly is going on here?' And when he hits that last scene, he'll realize what the character really is."

"*Power Line* basically concerns two Shadow Dweller kids: Victor Guillermos and Lenore Castle," says Chichester, turning to the next title in the trilogy, one penciled by David Ross and inked by Bob McCleod. "They don't know each other when the story begins, and they each have relatively weak and useless Shadow powers—Victor can generate a very weak force field while Lenore can do little 'hops' in the air through levitation. But when they come together, their powers complement each other *exponentially*, to the point where they may be every bit as powerful as Dr. Zero, although they don't realize it initially. They also don't have his experience.

"Victor's Uncle Ripley sees Zero, knows what Zero is and what he's up to, and figures that if any human ever finds out that this guy is a member of an alternate race, they will come down on *all* the Shadow Dwellers," he explains. "So, he wants to present a counter-image, an alternative to Zero, that *really* is doing good. He goes to a group of powerful Shadow Dwellers and presents his plan. They mock him. So, he turns to Victor and Lenore."

Moving on to *St. George*, which Klaus Janson will be drawing, Chichester reveals that the hero is actually Michael Devlin, a priest who has done missionary work in Latin America, dealing with the poor and the suffering. He was transferred to a parish in Brooklyn, where he saw more of the same grief and suffering but from different causes. He begins to wonder, 'Is there something *more* I can do?'"

Apparently there is. "A member of the Order of St. George—that group of Shadow Dweller monks on the mesa—make him an offer to become the Knight of St. George," he relates. "All through time,

Cover Art: Bill Sienkiewicz

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Though not a Shadow Dweller himself, it is their armor that transforms an ordinary priest into St. George.

these monks have presented humans with sets of cybernetic armor."

"The armor augments a human's psychic abilities to the Shadow Dweller level, but because a human is not a Shadow Dweller, he's dealing with a great amount of power that the body is unused to using. If there isn't a strong enough focus, the power can feed back on the user. Devlin's problem is to maintain that focus. Now, other St. Georges across time—since the original dragon-slayer—have had varying degrees of focus, some broad, some narrow. Devlin's is *extremely* narrow; without a clear-cut sense of wrong-doing,

(continued on page 67)

"Zero sees himself as the king of the Shadow Dwellers," notes Chichester. "The humans are only animals, so he's their king, too."

All Dr. Zero Art: Dwayne Cowan & Bill Sienkiewicz

Dr. Zero makes his grand entrance, and the world meets its greatest hero . . . or so it thinks.

A Knight on the Town with Klaus Janson

By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEIL

I wanted St. George to be a little more believable than the typical superhero," Klaus Janson explains. "All of the accoutrements—except for the armor itself—are store-bought. His vest, his boots, his tights, his gloves—all can be bought by anyone anywhere. The armor is passed on from the Order of St. George to him, and even that could be melted down and redesigned *if* he chose."

The triple-threat artist—who is pencil-

Whenever he isn't pitting a "St. George" against modern-day dragons, the artist takes his time with a weekly "Wolverine."

All St. George Art: Klaus Janson

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ling, inking and coloring St. George for Marvel's Epic line — says he had that aspect of the character in mind from the beginning. "Basically, the form, the silhouette, is that of a football player," he comments. "The armor is almost like shoulderpads. I'm not necessarily getting that image yet, but I'm working on it. I'm still very much in the middle of solving the problems of designing a character from scratch. It doesn't all gel in the first or second issue."

Janson admits that the character's design can also create difficulties in expression. "The helmet can become a problem in getting emotions across," he notes. "But, my attitude was that it was a challenge to try and convey emotional reactions *in spite of* the helmet. My solution was that you can see his eyes through the eyeslits. He also wears red goggles under the helmet. Red is a very emotional color in and of itself. In the long-shots, the reader can see the red and hopefully compensate for the 'missing' eyes. And, I'm using different angles to convey what eyebrows do on a bare face."

In addition to designing the character, Janson is involved in the storylines for St. George, collaborating with writers Margaret Clark and D.G. Chichester. "Storywise, I think Margaret and Dan pretty much have a plot in mind when we sit down and discuss a particular issue," he says. "I really like it when the three of us get together. I throw things in, and both Margaret and Dan are very amenable to that. The basic plot is theirs—except for the first issue, where the plot is Archie Goodwin's. I pace the story, certainly. I tell it my way—I have the plot in front of me and I draw up the story from that and our conversations. If I get stuck, I refer to the written plot, or call them up for explanations. The storytelling is mine. If I were going to break it down, I would say the story in any particular issue is 85 percent Margaret and Dan's and 15 percent mine."

Janson is perhaps best known for his past work with writer/artist Frank Miller on *Daredevil* and *The Dark Knight*, as well as for pencilling and inking the new *Punisher* series. He says the differences between those books and St. George are what led him to take on this assignment. "One of the things that attracted me to the book was that it seemed to be exactly the opposite of *The Punisher*," he notes. "The Punisher was dark, Mediterranean, bulky, with his face uncovered. This is completely the opposite, with a whole different set of problems to solve. Mike Devlin is a WASP, slim, tall, blond. The costumes are different, too.

"In addition, I like the idea of the Shadow Line concept, with the thin thread of continuity," Janson relates. "I prefer that thin thread to having every book interrelated. It was different from the very solo superhero I had been doing with the Punisher or Daredevil. There's a sense of underpinnings, that there's something going on that isn't on the surface. It lends an air of mystery and intrigue."

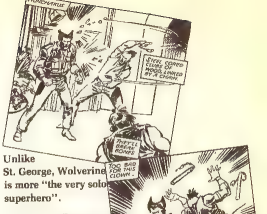
Like many of the artists who entered comics in the 1970s, Janson says he had no formal art education before making his professional breakthrough. "I apprenticed — and I use that term very loosely — with Dick Giordano," he recalls. "I did backgrounds for him on an infrequent basis. He lived in the next town from mine in Connecticut when I was a kid, and I would bring my work to him to be critiqued — and he suggested that I become a *writer*. Other than that massive support — thank you very much, Dick — I haven't had any formal art training, to my regret."

Janson's first published work (under his own name) was inking Rich Buckler's pencils on the Black Panther series in *Jungle Action*. "By that time, I had been going to Marvel and DC regularly, showing my portfolio, and being soundly rejected," he recalls. "I started doing production work under Sol Brodsky at Marvel, and it wasn't until Buckler saw my work and needed an inker that I got any freelance work. It isn't all glamour and lights.

"It's very hard to say who my influences are and were — but I will. One assimilates almost everything. You go through periods where you look at a particular artist's work and devour the work and the style, then move on."

He counts Wally Wood, Neal Adams, Giordano and Tom Palmer as major influences on his inking style. "Pencilling-wise, I can't really list anyone. I seem to do my own stuff, if I may be so bold," Janson chuckles. "Currently, I'm very much influenced by many of the European artists. And Milton Caniff — and I'm complimented when people recognize that in my work. It seems the older I get, the further back I go for my influences. The older guys appeal to a more sophisticated taste, and when you're younger, you can't appreciate them. I also look at fine artists for composition, and at movies. I see almost everything I can. I try to be influenced by non-comic book sources, so the stuff doesn't look repetitious."

Speaking of old comic-book hands, Janson is also working with John Buscema on the Wolverine series in the weekly *Marvel Universe*. "Buscema is doing breakdowns on 'Wolverine,' and I'm finishing it and coloring it," Janson reports. "After it appears in the weekly, it'll be reprinted in an album format, and I will recolor it for that edition. So, although the art will be the same in both versions, there *will* be differences. For example, we are shooting the stats before I put the zip-a-tone on for the weekly version, so it will look different in the compilation. That's good, because it's starting to seem as if every second book is being reprinted. This way, if somebody buys the album and the weekly, they will be getting a slightly different product."



Unlike St. George, Wolverine is more "the very solo superhero".

The concept of a weekly comic book is somewhat new in American publishing, and although Janson says he doesn't expect any problems in his work for *Marvel Universe*, he is sure the "deadline doom" will eventually crop up. "The weekly deadline hasn't made any difference to my working methods yet because the book is pretty far ahead of schedule. I don't expect to be affected by it because the eight-page increments are small enough that I could, if necessary, do it in just two days. Of course, I wouldn't have time to eat dinner, but that is the price you pay for procrastination," he laughs.

"Eventually, there *will* be deadline problems on both Marvel's and DC's weeklies," Janson observes. "I can't imagine how there would not be. Even with the monthlies, there are always problems cropping up. It's an interesting experiment for comics." ■

It may look like Wolverine's in trouble now, but according to Janson, it's going to look different when the serial is collected.

THAT'S REAL INTERESTING, STRANGER--
CONSIDERING DAVE CHAPEL IS DEAD!
SO MUCH FOR THE DIRECT APPROACH.
Wolverine Art: John Buscema & Klaus Janson

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All American Flagg! Art: Trademark & Copyright 1988 First Comics, Inc. & Howard Chaykin Inc.

"Flagg was created as my in-panel persona," notes Chaykin.

Howard Chaykin Home on the Plexus Range

Back from "Blackhawk," the controversial comics creator finds plenty of "Time²" to return to his original love, "American Flagg!"

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Howard Chaykin is proudly waving his *American Flagg!* After creating the title for First Comics and working on it for more than two years, he says he *tried* to retire. But now, the writer/artist has returned to start again with *Howard Chaykin's American Flagg!* After years of absence, he admits it feels a little strange to be back.

"It has been a while since I really looked at the book and thought about the material," he says. "I spent time figuring out what it would take to revive *Flagg!* and bring it back to some semblance of what it deserved, and also come up with a solid structural basis. We're not so much ignoring the issues that followed my original tenure as *disregarding* them—there *is* a semantic difference. Continuity means as much to me as ice hockey, and that ain't much! I'm willing to make adjustments, rather than deal with unnecessary baggage."

Coming up in the first issues of the new *Flagg!* is a change of scenery set up in *American Flagg!* #47–50. "We're moving a number of characters to the Soviet Union, with Flagg teaching the Soviets how to be Americans by the standards of the late 1950s," Chaykin explains.

"I'm not simply starting this out with 'Here we are in the Soviet Union'—we took four issues to pull Flagg out of Chicago, get him to Europe, and get the new characters and situations underway with as high a level of moral outrage as I did. Frankly, this book offends and insults a good part of the comic book audience who are much too complacent, anyway."

Despite the other changes, Reuben Flagg is pretty much the same.

"He's still the basically moral guy who can be seduced by sex or power—so, he's like anybody else. I've said more than once that I don't do Boy Scout characters because I can't write somebody who's morally superior to me, and it's difficult to write a lead who is morally *inferior* to me."

Not surprisingly, Chaykin admits that he empathizes with the Plexus Ranger. "Flagg was created as my in-panel persona. People who know me well recognize the voice, tone, attitude, and manner. I'm obviously not 6'2" and gorgeous with a great nose—but then, I wouldn't make a very good comic book character! So, I created my doppelganger.

"All of my characters reflect in some way the persona that I'm feeling at that point—some consider it a failure, but I just consider it my kind of consistency. I've taken a great deal of flak for drawing the same hero, but frankly, I feel that drawing is a skill that can be taught to morons, and it's less relevant than having more than one idea," remarks Chaykin.

"*American Flagg!* is about sex and violence. Interestingly enough, whenever anyone else has come onto the property, there has been a presumption that I used full frontal nudity and foul language, neither of which I did. Bear in mind that at least a percentage of the audience took the United Fruit Company reference as a homophobic remark. That was a hurtful situation that occurred years ago, but I'm not going to adjust the book's frame of reference to explain to the passively ignorant."

Chaykin says that ultimately, he writes to please a very tiny audience: himself. "There *have* to be at least a couple of guys out there like me!" he observes. "I've de-

Art: Howard Chaykin & Richard Ory

The prospect of a *Flagg!* film helped lure Chaykin to return.

scribed my position in this business more than once as 'Republicans, Democrats and me!' The mainstream largely regards me as hopelessly outre and avant garde, while the elitists regard me as hopelessly mainstream—so, that puts me in the middle. I'm trying to reach an audience that is at least beginning to recognize that their intelligence is being insulted by *most* of the mass-market material, but still enjoys it. They also find appeal in the elitist material, but they're interested occasionally in entertaining genre fiction. *That's* the audience I'm looking to find.

"I don't feel that 'genre' is necessarily followed by 'trash,' anymore than 'sex' is preceded by 'gratuitous' or 'violence' by 'senseless.' Violence is simply the outward sign of inner turmoil and trauma. Considering the state of American comics before *Flagg!*, any sexual content is going to be preceded by 'gratuitous.' We're dealing with an audience and a talent pool that are terrified of their own fantasies and have to have them masked under five or six layers. The costumes for the Legion of Super-Heroes look like a Frederick's of Hollywood catalogue, but with enough coating to keep people away from their own fantasies. I'm not ashamed, upset or embarrassed about my own fantasies—it makes me a happier human being!"

Howard Chaykin's American Flagg! is plotted by Chaykin, who also does the page breakdowns. "I've worked too many cases where a comic-book author/writer has given me a paragraph of 23 pages of work—the splash page is described, and then there's a 22-page fight scene. I'm not being facetious, that's *really* the way it is."

Mike Vosburg does thumbnail sketches of each page, and after they're examined, Mindy Newell does the dialogue. The finishes are then done by Vosburg, Richard Ory, Tony Van de Walle and art director Chaykin. Colorist John Moore and original letterer Ken Bruzenak round out the creative team.

"It's too daunting a job to do alone," Chaykin explains. "There isn't enough money in it—it's a small, wonderful book, but the audience is like a bunch of ravens and crows, titillated by shiny objects. The more successful talents in the business reflect, support and share the audience's sensibilities, not the least of which is that evil is an external force—the last time *that* was taken seriously was Nazi Germany, and to them, the Jews were the evil external force. I find that sort of behavior morally offensive, but it's precisely the ethic of most contemporary action/adventure comics."

Art: Mike Vosburg & Howard Chaykin

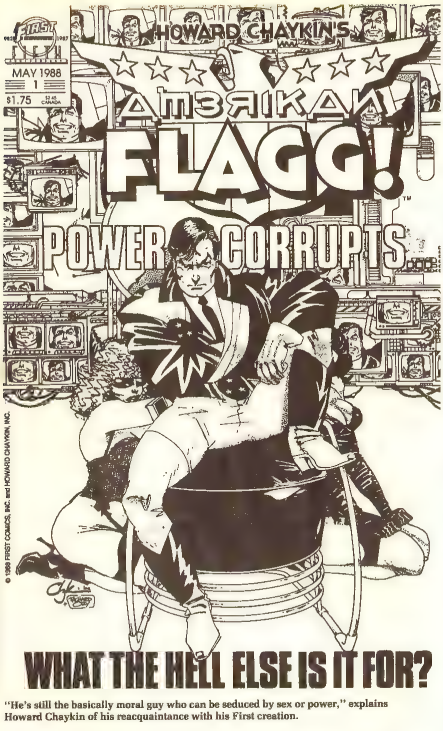
"American Flagg! is about sex and violence," states Chaykin, although not necessarily in that order.

The 37-year-old writer/artist says he decided to return to *Flagg!* after he was approached by First Comics and asked. "I regard it as at least a tacit acknowledgement that they needed me more than I needed them," he notes. "The material had clearly gotten out of hand, and I don't quite know why. I felt I had left behind a very muscular property, with numerous loose ends, and nobody knew what to do with it. But, we live in an age of sequels, most of which are remakes. My coming back was the combined factors of a movie deal, First wanting to have a better-looking book on the market, and the series deserving more. In its time, *Flagg!* was an important addition to the comic-book market."

After about two years on the original *American Flagg!*, though, Chaykin says he was burnt out. "I retired from the book because I was tired, physically exhausted. I delivered that book on time, 12 issues on my terms, and then another 12, until we brought in new talent from outside. We didn't get back on track until we had Joe Staton, who unfortunately couldn't stay on the book too long. *Flagg!* had become my life, in a field where the average monthly product is two guys mistaking each other for bad guys and pounding the shit out of each other for 23 pages. I was trying to deliver material that justified more than six minutes on the john because I thought the medium deserved it."

He says he didn't follow *Flagg!* too closely after his departure, calling the post-

If this cover reminds you of the Moonlighting episode "Cool Hand Dave," it may be because Chaykin believes "Bruce Willis would have also made a great Flagg."



Art: Howard Chaykin & Richard Ory
© 1988 FIRST COMICS, INC. and HOWARD CHAYKIN, INC.

"He's still the basically moral guy who can be seduced by sex or power," explains Howard Chaykin of his reacquaintance with his First creation.

Chaykin series "meandering, wandering and stupid, having no grasp of what the book is about." One of the factors that drew him back—in addition to the challenge of reviving *Flagg!*—is the possibility of an *American Flagg!* film, currently being negotiated. Chaykin admits, however, that his involvement with any movie will probably be minimal.

"Obviously, I want to write the movie, but realistically, I have no track record in Hollywood. They may like my comic book, but I haven't demonstrated through the work that I've delivered. I haven't sold the movie. I'm not interested in obviating the presence of the film by being an asshole—I *want* the movie to get made. I know it won't be a filmed translation of what I did in the comic.

"I would like to participate on as many levels as possible. In my heart of hearts, I would love to write the screenplay, but I don't think it would sell the movie—which is a realistic attitude. I don't believe I can move laterally from my position in comics to movies because the job and language are different."

He pauses. "I designed *Flagg!* with the original intention of its being a film, so I would like it to look the way I visualized it—a devastated world in the middle of a depression in the next century. I saw *Silverado* and wanted Kevin Costner for the lead; Bruce Willis would have also made a great Flagg.

"For me, the character of Flagg has to encompass at least one aspect of the movies' Tom Jones, which is to directly relate to the audience. Flagg is *Candide*, and above all of the characters, Flagg is there to represent the audience. He can turn to the camera and, through expression and attitude, allow the audience to collude with his feelings."

Despite the activity on *Flagg!*, Chaykin is not letting up on his *Time*[2] trilogy.

"I'm hoping that as soon as *Flagg!* is sold as a movie, the next thing will be *Time*[2]. My own idiotic fantasies of *Time*[2] is to see it as a movie musical, with a pit band or on-camera combo, or possibly a Greek chorus of the Manhattan Transfer—I don't necessarily think the leads should sing. It's a fairy tale of New York, and I would love to see it happen, maybe with Mandy Patinkin or Jay Leno," he says, noting that the third volume is underway.

"When the first one came out, the comic book audience presumed that it would be *American Flagg!* with another outfit and bigger breasts. They were *very* disappointed because there wasn't as much sex and violence. *Time*[2] is a romantic book, and also a crime book where no one cares who did it. It's very important to me, it's where I'm trying to get other stuff in—it's deliberately obscure and trying other things. I won't say it's ahead of its time—it's slightly to the side of its time!"

With his *Blackhawk* series just finished at DC, Chaykin admits a sentimental attachment drew him to the title. "*Blackhawk* was the first comic book I ever stole—and I mean this with no irony. It's clearly an important book in the memories of men my age, who remember the Blackhawks as flying fascists on our side. I developed the premise five years ago, and with the advent of the Prestige format mini-series, there was a place for such a property.

"I feel I developed a very true-to-the-character property that will re-commercialize the material. I'm very happy with the book. If any character I've ever done comes close to being a Boy Scout, it's Blackhawk. These characters are all being revamped because they were commercial failures. I did it with *The Shadow* and I did it with *Blackhawk*. *Blackhawk* has not been a commercial success since shortly after DC bought it from Quality."

The upcoming *Blackhawk* series in *Action Comics Weekly* took Chaykin a little by surprise, but he says he assumes the stories will be done in accordance with his revisions. "I only found out about the revival a short time ago and know nothing about it. I haven't seen anything of it and don't much care. People have asked what I think of the current *Shadow*, and it doesn't matter to me—this is what I do for a living."

"I don't do Boy Scout characters," Chaykin comments. His version of Blackhawk was after more than merit badges.

His newest comic book work arrives in *Black Kiss*, a new monthly series from Vortex which premieres in May. "It's an erotic horror book, as erotic as it is horrific, and vice versa. If any part of the audience was upset and offended by *Flagg!*, I would recommend that they stay away from this one at all costs! If I danced on thin ice with *Flagg!*, I'm going for the gold medal on this one. I've wanted to do an erotic comic book for years, and sex and death are so intrinsically connected in every culture—one can't get too far away from sex without thinking about death!"

Chaykin is also developing several film treatments unrelated to comic books, including romantic thrillers and adventure stories. But after viewing the *Sable* TV series premiere, he says he is heartened at the prospect of a *Flagg!* film.

"I was delighted with *Sable*, because that show's producer, Dick Rosetti, is looking at *Flagg!* We're talking about several properties together, but *Flagg!* is a character that would translate into a mass market film. In my highest of fantasies, I see it as the James Bond of the '90s, a reasonably mature series that isn't going to turn off kids."

In addition to *Flagg!*, Chaykin has also worked on a proposed *Blackhawk* film. "I wrote a treatment based on the comic book, which was rejected. A year-and-a-half later, after having done a number of treatments, I realized what I delivered was comparable to an eight- to 12-hour mini-series! I rarely use captions and dialogue in my stuff—the material should tell itself in pantomime and dialogue, which is my means of preparing to write films.

"I've just written a new *Blackhawk* treatment which is considerably simpler, more direct, and bears almost no resemblance to the comic—the characters and points-of-view are different. The Blackhawk I've developed is a Blackhawk that can be read

"*Blackhawk* was the first comic book I ever stole—and I mean this with no irony," says Chaykin.

Having completed DC's mini-series, Chaykin is now working toward getting a *Blackhawk* film made.

by people who are familiar with the comic character. The film character has to be simplified because film audiences don't know about comic books.

"But, *Blackhawk* is a labor of love for me. One thing about comics—and life in general—is that we have gurus, adults who help us along, and we cannot give it back to them. We have to find someone in the next generation to give it back to. Gil Kane, Wally Wood, Gray Morrow and Neal Adams were my mentors, and I've spent a good part of my career over the last 10 years giving it away. I've had good people working for me. That's why I don't think about what happens to a character when I leave," explains Howard Chaykin with a smile. "What's important is what I'm doing right now—and I'm having a real good time at it!" ■

All Blackhawk Art: Howard Chaykin

All Blackhawk Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987 DC Comics Inc.

Who was that Masked Vegetable?

By WILL MURRAY

Bob Burden hints at the absurd answers to the incredible mystery of the Flaming Carrot!

Bob Burden knows who he is. "I'm a writer and an artist and an adventurer in the literary scene of the 20th century," he says. "I can't say I'm better than James Joyce and T.S. Eliot, but I'm in the same genre. Certainly much more so than *Saturday Night Live*. Just because it's humor doesn't make it non-literary."

He knows who his greatest creation, the Flaming Carrot, really is, too. But he's not telling. At least, not yet.

"I've been sitting back and keeping it a mystery because of the fact that I want to reveal it on nationwide TV, on Johnny Carson or the David Letterman show. The Carrot's secret will make a great deal of sense once you know who it is."

It takes a certain bend of mind to create a comic-book superhero whose secret identity is a famous person in the real world, but Bob Burden thrives on the absurd. It's hard to say who is more outrageous, creator or creation.

"*Flaming Carrot Comics* details the furthest adventures of the strangest man alive," Burden explains. "The Flaming Carrot is an individual who is a man of mystery. He has a big carrothead with flames coming out the top, and flippers. He has no super powers. When he gets in a spot, he pulls out his gun and blasts away, instead of thinking his way out like Batman or flying away like Superman."

Appropriately, the Flaming Carrot has had a checkered history. He first appeared in an independent comic called *Visions* in 1979. After three appearances, Burden decided to self-publish him and in 1981, during the last gasp of underground comics, the oversized *Flaming Carrot Comics* #1 appeared. Evidently, comics readers didn't know what to make of the book. Was it an underground? Was that the Carrot's actual head or a mask? Who was this guy Bob Burden anway?

Disappointed, ("It wasn't the overnight sensation I expected it to be," he admits frankly), Burden decided to move on to other things. But destiny, in the form of Cerebus's Dave Sim, intervened.

"Sim saw the oversized #1 and *Visions*. We had met briefly at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. He got in touch with me and said how about doing a Unique Story [a back-up series in *Cerebus*]. I said, 'Hell, let's do three of them!' Sim says, 'Yeah, and maybe we can do a whole book if the response is good!' Well, we went ahead and did the book even though I think we only got *three* letters."

The second *Flaming Carrot Comics* #1 appeared in 1984. When Deni Loubert left Aardvark-Vanaheim to form Renegade Comics, she took Burden and the Carrot with her. Initial sales were good, but the audience grew slowly, tentatively.

The Flaming Carrot is an absurdist superhero. The first issue recapped what has so far been the Carrot's official origin: "Once a mild-mannered existential poet employed by the phone company, he read over 5,000 comics in a single sitting to win a bet. He won, but his mind could not take the strain and he became ... simple." Burden now admits this origin is "apocryphal" and bears no resemblance to the real-life person who is truly the Flaming Carrot.

In fact, Burden almost shies away from taking responsibility for dreaming up the character.

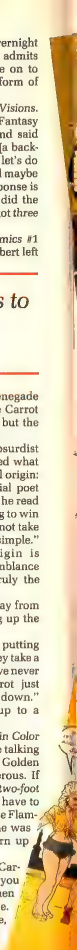
"Most people create things by putting two things together," he says. "They take a horse and put wings on him. But I've never worked that way. Flaming Carrot just came out of the blue and I wrote it down."

But when pressed, he owns up to a bizarre array of Carrot influences.

"At the time, I was reading *All in Color for a Dime*. In that book, they were talking about the Fin. The Fin was this Golden Age character who was preposterous. If he walked into a room—he had a *two-foot* fin on top of his head—he would have to bend over to get in the doorway. The Flaming Carrot is in the same vein. If he was going in anywhere, he would burn up the ceiling."

When Burden remarks that the Carrot is "kind of a modern Conan," you begin to doubt his sanity. But when he explains it, it makes weird sense.

"I remember a guy telling me,



Yeah, the Batmobile, the Fantastica and things like that are for sissies! Real heroes use pogo-sticks!

"You could put Batman in the same situation," Burden notes, "just make him stupid."

be interchangeable with any number of other superheroes. "You could put Batman in the same situation," he remarks, "just make him a little stupid."

The secret of the Carrot's appeal may be his childlike nature. He's an adult trapped in a demented eternal childhood, yet he frequents strange bars where the most interesting bimbos in comics fall for him. He looks like an ambulatory vegetable, but he's not. Yet by another line of reasoning, he *is* a vegetable. By Burden's own admission, the Carrot is "virtually retarded."

The stories are full of absurdist dadaesque touches. In one issue, the Carrot tangles with an evil impostor. When he unmasks the pseudo-Carrot, it turns out to be ABC White House correspondent Sam Donaldson. Then, in Chinese box fashion, the Carrot discovers it is actually a zombie wearing a Sam Donaldson mask under a carrothead!

Many Carrot tales are loosely plotted with similar non-sequitur highlights, such as the memorable scene in issue #3 when

Photo: Courtesy Bob Burden

"Flaming Carrot just came out of the blue," confesses Bob Burden.

'You ought to read Conan. It's about this barbarian and when he gets in a spot, he just pulls out his sword and chops everybody to pieces. He's not real smart. He's like a studio wrestler.' I thought that was an interesting concept. The Carrot, who just pulls out his guns and blasts away, is similar to that.

"If you're looking for influences," he adds, dropping another unexpected name. "There's the concept of the Spider pulps where by 15, 20 pages into the story, there would be 200 people killed. That had an influence on the outrageousness of the Carrot stories. I remember the number of people who died in one Spider adventure and totally losing count, there were so many. The gangsters were flying around in airplanes and dropping bombs on New York and strafing the streets."

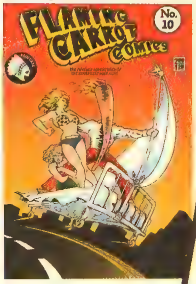
Despite his statements, Burden claims that he's telling ordinary comic-book stories and that the Flaming Carrot could

it's revealed that the secret hideout of the Carrot's great foe, the Artless Dodger, is the spare bathroom of the Carrot's own house! In another issue, the Carrot lies in a coma. Normal attempts to revive him fail. Even opening one of the last intact packages of *Mars Attacks* cards and forcing him to sniff the gum does not work. Finally, in desperation, the Carrot's friends call in a song request. Hearing the lyricized

What's this? Another team book? Naw, it's OK. The Mystery Men only turned up for a couple of issues.

Truly a comic on the edge.

The Flaming Carrot: a hero who represents the free spirit in all of us.



version of the *Bonanza* theme song over the radio pulls him out. In many ways, then, the story isn't the thing in *Flaming Carrot*. The little set-pieces and throwaway interludes stick in the mind long after the storyline fades from memory.

"You can tell by reading it that even I don't know what's going to happen next," Burden admits. "And that's the fun part."

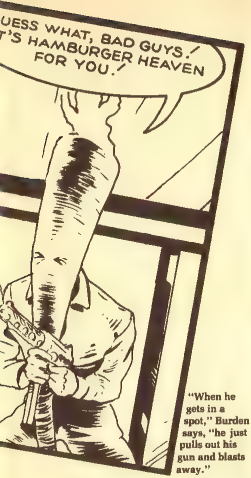
Perhaps the quintessential Flaming Carrot exploit—and one which has become a legend among Carrot fans—was issue #12, titled, "The Dead Dog Leaped Up and Flew Around the Room!" The title tells it all. The Carrot finds an old suitcase and opening it, lets loose the flying corpse of a dead dog. Impervious to bullets, it attacks the Carrot's base of operations, an industrial town called Palookaville. The Carrot chases it for 28 pages, finally whacking it to pieces with a two-by-four. End of story.

The Carrot's charm is that he succeeds by luck and not skill. In one issue, he beats off a Martian invasion by sitting them down and explaining American income tax. The Martians leave in a panic.

Recently, the Flaming Carrot popped up unexpectedly in *Cerebus* #104, a collaboration that took place in Burden's Georgia home and was videotaped for posterity. Other crossovers with independent titles are in the planning stages, including an appearance in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Burden admits that opportunities for crossovers are limited. "He could cross over with *Reid Fleming*," Burden laughs.

Last summer, Burden released *Robot Comics* and for Comico, he wrote *Gumby's Summer Fun Special*, which takes the reader back to his childhood and leaves him there. Drawn by Art Adams, it was extremely well received.

"Art's a real professional," Burden says. "He really came across with what I wanted to see. When you write something, you expect to see 50 percent of what's in



"When he gets in a spot," Burden says, "he just pulls out his gun and blasts away."

your head come out on paper and he was more like 95 percent. That was better than I do on my own stuff!"

Like *Cerebus*' Dave Sim, Burden doesn't see himself as a writer/artist, but as a writer who happens to draw his own stuff.

"I'm not that good an illustrator," he admits. "I don't have the ability to draw the same character over and over. Right now, though, I'm getting to the point where I can draw the Flaming Carrot pretty well."

Although it's not a secret, many fans of fellow Georgia artist Rod Whigham don't realize that Whigham has been assisting Burden with the Carrot ever since 1981.

"Originally, he helped me finish the oversized *Flaming Carrot* #1," Burden recalls. "To get it done in time was kind of like that Marx Brothers movie where they pull the wood off the train and throw it in the engine to keep the engine going. We were just going a mile a minute. I brought in Rod to draw many of the backgrounds. In issue #17, he pencilled a whole page."

However, for a man who both scripts and draws his own comics, Burden is not a champion of the lone genius school of comic books. He would rather collaborate. "Working with someone else is important and vital insofar as you've go to do it to stay interested in your work. Everything goes much slower if you're all alone. That's the sad thing about it. In the old days, you had a studio and everybody could get together and synergistically build off each other. I would rather be part of a big team myself." For that reason, he can foresee a day when he passes the Flaming Carrot torch to another artist and only does scripts, as with *Gumby's Summer Fun Special*.

Many Carrot fans were impressed by how Burdenesque *Gumby's Summer Fun Special* was, even though he didn't draw it. But for Burden himself, the book was a key event for other reasons.

"I think the thing that did me the greatest good was *Gumby*," he says. "When it came out, it was a legitimate comic, whereas *Flaming Carrot Comics* was like the comic that didn't exist. People started looking at *Carrot* in a different light after *Gumby* came out. The Hernandez brothers are very seriously and reverently considered, but I'm not respected in the same way that they are, like Ernest Hemingway."

Never one to run in place, Burden is taking the Carrot in new directions this year. Beginning with the 18th issue, he returns to self-publishing. *Flaming Carrot Comics* will be distributed by Dark Horse and carry their logo. Because it will be printed by the same printer Renegade used, Burden foresees no significant difference in the look of the book. Nor will the deliciously demented brand of stories change. The first Dark Horse issue will feature a typical tale, "The Snipe Hunters."

"It's a summer fun-type adventure," Burden reveals. "The Carrot is in Smallville. There's not really much crime there because Superboy took care of it many years ago. The Carrot's just hanging out. He hears about this weird group, the Ice Cream Cult. They worship weird images and rub ice cream all over themselves. He gets off watching them do all this creepy stuff, then it turns out that the cult are aliens who are kidnapping people and making them their slaves. In order to shut off this bridgehead of aliens coming in from another dimension, the Carrot enlists a bunch of Trekkies. The Trekkies fight the aliens and some of them even get killed in their little Trekkie outfits. They're out there saving the world while everybody else is watching TV and goofing off."

In an issue called "The Mystery Train," the Carrot may again fight the Dragoon, the Frankensteinian version of the Carrot who wears a sportscoat and has "eyes like burnt marshmallows," last seen in issue #8.

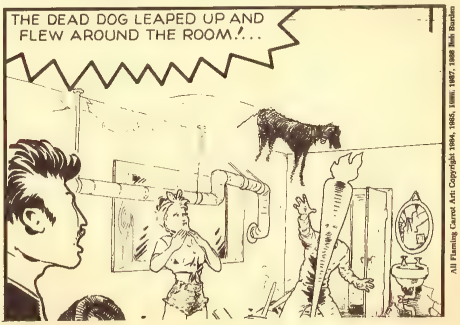
Burden also promises the return of the Carrot's Pillsbury Doughboy-like sidekick, Sponge Boy, in the near future. Another long-dormant subplot, the unexplained radio speaker implanted in the Carrot's chest, will begin talking again. "I may never explain it," Burden adds mischievously.

He is considering several experimental *Flaming Carrot* issues. "I can do anything I want with this series. I could tell stories about Drasticus, who is one of the Carrot's descendants. He's a warlord in the future who has *Star Wars*-type adventures. Or I could do a mystery. Or take an EC-type story and have the Flaming Carrot sit around the campfire and tell it."

Other impending Burden projects include more of his irregular Draconian Features, of which the recent *Robot Comics* was part. Burden also threatens Carrot spin-offs like *The Bikini Teens* and *Sponge Boy Comics*, but he promises that no matter what, he will never completely abandon the Carrot.

"Even if things click in the near future and I wind up doing motion pictures, I'll still have at least one Carrot a year coming out. It's my lucky rabbit's foot. The main thing is that there *will* be Bob Burden product out there. *Flaming Carrot* is my *THX-1138*, not my *Star Wars*." ■

Flaming Carrot fans may disagree.



Uh, yeah, what the panel says.

What Tangled Webs We Weave . . .

The Amazing Spider-Man hits 300 and finds a new villain who's dressed to kill and ready to hit back.

By DANIEL DICKHOLTZ

That the story of a science student bitten by a radioactive arachnid could last beyond a dying anthology comic's final issue must have been an amazing fantasy to co-creators Stan Lee and Steve Ditko. Nevertheless, the spectacular Spider-Man, not looking a month over 299, is now preparing to celebrate his tricentennial, and for the longest time, his current creative team had no idea what to get a wall-crawler who has practically everything.

"People wanted a big thing," notes editor Jim Salicrup. "There were many events that were coming up and are still coming up in *Spider-Man*, and we didn't want to juggle stuff around to the point where it would be squeezed into the 300th issue *just so* it could be in the 300th issue. For example, eventually, Peter Parker will be going back to college, but we figured that would be silly to have happen in the middle of winter. Also, it's not that big a deal in terms of saying, 'In this 300th issue . . .' We were planning the return of the red and blue costume anyway, and creating a new major super-villain was even more pleasing."

But just as the wondrous web-slinger gets his old costume back, his new arch-rival, the vindictive Venom, will take possession of the alien black and white outfit, apparently risen from its four-color grave. Combining a seemingly inexhaustible supply of webbing and extra power and speed with his own naturally massive muscles and unquenchable thirst for

"The reason he has this big, demonic smile," Todd McFarlane reveals, "is because when I first drew Venom, I didn't know there was a man underneath the alien costume."

vengeance, the alien attire makes this new foe more than a match for Peter Parker's proportionate spider-abilities. Surprisingly, before Venom could display his symbiotic suit, writer David Michelinie had intended someone else to pick up Spider-Man's discarded laundry.

"When I was doing *Web*, I had originally set up a storyline which had to do with someone somehow getting past Spider-Man's spider-sense, even pushing Peter Parker in front of a subway train at one point. This idea was building up to the alien symbiote costume melding with someone else, and in that storyline, it had been a *woman*," he confesses. "This was also going to be tied in with a past story where Spider-Man was fighting some gargantuan creature. This woman was about to give birth and her husband had been rushing her to the hospital, and the creature stepped on their car. I left *Web*, and that storyline dangled and went away. Also, Spider-Woman appeared in a black and white costume, so that was no longer practical."

However, when the inclusion of the multibook stories and inventory fill-ins made it impractical for Michelinie to design an epic that could culminate in the double-sized tricentennial, the alien costume became the perfect thread for the writer to sew things up.

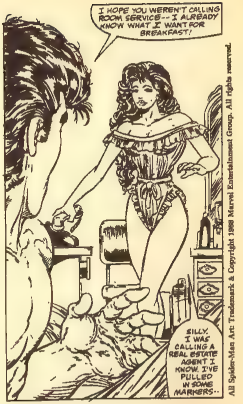
"We needed an event for #300, so I altered my previous storyline to the creation of this new villain who would be very strong, very dangerous and be personally directed toward Spider-Man," explains Michelinie. This foe would "not just be an army-of-heroes' villain but would be very specifically anti-Spider-Man, someone who could be used in the future as a very deadly, major force."

This major new enemy draws all his motivation from an almost trivial event that occurred during the original Sin-Eater story in *Spectacular Spider-Man* #107-110. Respected journalist Eddie Brock had been at the top of his profession when he began writing up his series of interviews with the masked mass murderer. Millions of readers turned to the *Daily Bugle*'s rival, the *Daily Globe*, for the latest installment of the killer's confessions in Brock's columns. That is, until Spider-Man captured the real Sin-Eater.

"I based this character on the reporter, Jimmy Breslin," Michelinie reveals. "I was living in New York at the time of the Son of Sam murders, and Breslin was in contact with this guy who said he was the Son of Sam. Breslin wrote a series of [*New York Daily News*] columns and then a book called .44 [with co-author Dick Schaap], which was ostensibly fiction but based on their discussions. I based Brock on that idea, and it tied in well with the other storyline, especially since there was a character who admitted to being Sin-Eater and really wasn't."

His career ruined, and his life in shambles, Brock tries to escape the tabloid articles he has been reduced to writing and his increasing thoughts of suicide by taking refuge in an old church. The alien symbiote has also been finding strength there, and so the two form a less-than-holy alliance and a permanent place for themselves in Spider-Man history.

YEAH. I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.
WEARING THE SAME OUTFIT AS A HOMICIDAL MANIAC DOESN'T THRILL ME, EITHER!
AND SINCE IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO GET VENOM'S SUIT AWAY FROM HIM--
I KNOW THIS ISN'T A REAL COSTUME. JUST A COMMERCIAL COPY YOU GOT WHEN YOU WERE IN GERMANY. A BUT RIGHT NOW--
--IT ALMOST SEEMS LIKE AN OLD FRIEND. WHAT DO YOU THINK?
MARY JANE, I THINK--
...IN THE SPIDER-MAN VS. WOLVERINE SPECIAL--J.R.


I HOPE YOU WEREN'T CALLING ROOM SERVICE-- I ALREADY KNOW WHAT I WANT FOR BREAKFAST!
SILLY. I WAS CALLING A REAL ESTATE AGENT I KNOW. I'VE FILLED W SOME MARINERS!
All Spider-Man Art: Trademark & Copyright 1990 Marvel Entertainment Group. All rights reserved.

"I'm trying to make Mary Jane sexy in some panels since she is going to be married to Peter," notes McFarlane.

Issue #300 offers more than the addition of an amazing new menace. "It's a new starting point," announces Salicrup. "The foundation has been set. We have had the wedding [see COMICS SCENE #2/1], Peter and Mary Jane have a new place, he is back in the old costume, he has different priorities now, and he's going to be proceeding from there. *Spider-Man* #300 sets the stage for things to come."

Among upcoming events will be a new view of an old design. "I always liked the way Ditko drew Spider-Man's costume," admits artist Todd McFarlane, who was sold on doing the series when he heard about the return to the original outfit. "It was subtle, but he always put twice as many webs in the costume, and he put them in weirder positions than John Romita did. I always liked the costume that Ditko was toying around with in the first 10 issues more than the one that has become so commercial that it looks like something from a coloring book. My design is to use the best of both worlds. I'm trying to take the commercial look of John Romita, the handsome Peter Parker with

"The black costume is neat," says McFarlane, "but to me, Spider-Man is still the old red and blue one."

the nice build on him, but when he's in costume, I'm going to the Steve Ditko costume and poses.

Thanks to a dangling plot thread and Jimmy Breslin, David Michelinie turned Eddie Brock into the vicious Venom.

"The biggest thing I saw in looking through past Spider-Man comics is once he got into his costume, the artists placed too much on the man in Spider-Man. I'm trying to place more on the *spider*, put him in positions where he's triple-jointed and crouched. I want to put him in positions *nobody* else could get into in the whole Marvel universe or comic books, period. If you just saw him in silhouette, you would still know that he was Spider-Man."

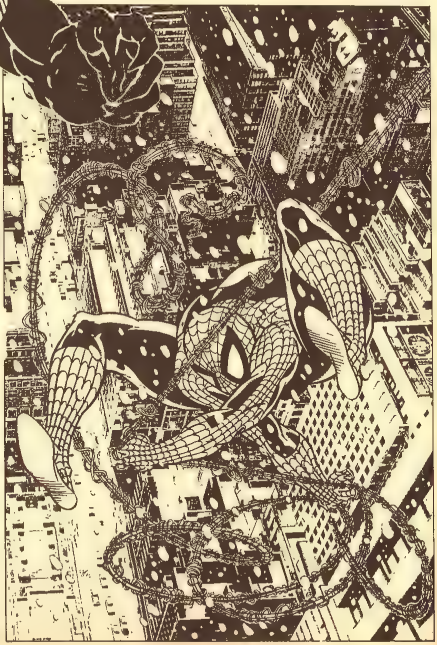
On the other hand, after more than two decades, McFarlane feels Mary Jane Watson-Parker is ready for a face-lift. "Her looks were designed by Romita during the hippie era and they have never done anything with it since," he notes. "It's the '80s going on the '90s, and she is supposed to be a big-time model like Cheryl Tiegs. So, I'm just trying to make her good-looking, make her sexy, give her lots of flowing hair and make her look more high class than she has in the past."

However, because Mary Jane has been making a fortune with her photogenic features, Michelinie notes that the newlyweds won't just be moving into a new, more spacious apartment, they'll also be moving into a new tax bracket.

"I read this newspaper article about Paulina Porizkova, who is *the* top fashion model. This woman makes between $1,500 and $3,000 a day and she works *five days* a week. That comes out to about a million dollars a year. Now, if Mary Jane is making that kind of money, even if she

(continued on page 67)

Now that he (and Spider-Man) have taken on Venom, McFarlane "wouldn't mind taking a crack at Mysterio."



All Spider-Man Art: Todd McFarlane

Let Us Now Praise Famous Ducks

Carl Barks' dramatic drakes quack again as Disney animators tell new "Duck Tales."

You won't find his name anywhere in the credits, but the basic premise of the fabulously wealthy Scrooge McDuck taking his grand nephews on globetrotting adventures is solid Carl Barks.

By DAVID HUTCHISON

Carl Barks originally created the character of Uncle Scrooge in 1947 for the story "Christmas on Bear Mountain." In this tale, Scrooge is a lonely, crabby old miser, who decides to try gift-giving as a possible source of fun (Scrooge has never had any fun). His nephew, Donald Duck, is to be the recipient of Scrooge's first gift, if Donald can first pass a test. Scrooge invites Donald and the nephews (Huey, Dewey and Louie) to his Bear Mountain cabin for the holidays, and then climbs into an old bearskin to see whether Donald lives up to his cowardly reputation or not. Of course, a real grizzly shows up, too, and the fun begins.

It was not many months later that Barks had a story with Donald and the boys set in a spooky old Scottish castle. In "The Old Castle's Secret," Scrooge must raise several million dollars in a hurry. Thinking that an ancient treasure may be stashed away in McDuck Castle of Dismal Downs, Scotland, Scrooge enlists the aid of his nephews to find the booty.

Lurking in the shadows, ready to relieve Scrooge of all his money problems, are the nefarious Beagle Boys.

Within the pages of the Disney comics over the next four years, Scrooge's character quickly grew from a lonely old miser into a brilliant (if quirky), multi-faceted personality that almost anyone could admire. He was a duck of vast wealth (his money bin holds three cubic acres of lucre) with international holdings in mines, manufacturing and agriculture. A self-made duck, he made his fortune the old-fashioned way: he *earned* it.

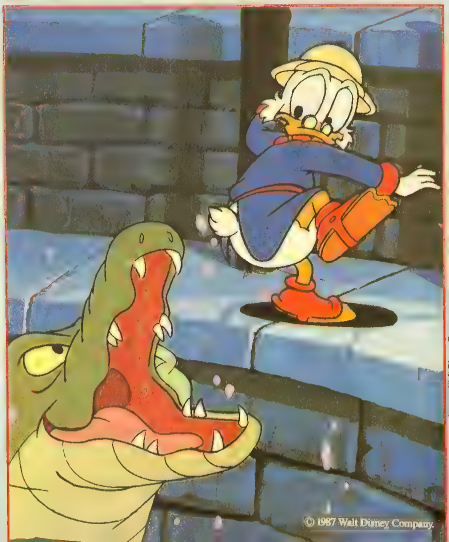
In 1952, Uncle Scrooge became a star with his own comic book, wherein he proceeded to involve his nephews in a series of adventures. Scrooge, Donald and the boys might find themselves trekking across the African veldt, exploring ancient temples in the jungles of the Amazon, burrowing far underground to find unknown civilizations, or even heading to China or the mountains of Tibet. The globetrotting Ducks found excitement everywhere. Though Carl Barks stopped writing and drawing Duck adventures 20 years ago, his stories are still extensively reprinted, both here (by Gladstone Comics) and in many languages around the world.

But now, Scrooge's adventures have broken out of their printed panels with the appearance of a new syndicated animated TV series, *Duck Tales*. Updated versions of the old Barks tales along with many *new* adventures and characters can be seen in most cities five days a week.

After Disney's first steps into limited animation with *Gummi Bears* and *Wuzzles* on Saturday mornings, the studio wanted to go beyond the 13-episode TV-network market and create a series that could run in full syndication with 65 episodes. Certainly, there was plenty of story material—fully 15 years of Barks' Scrooge exploits.

When the Disney TV execs began proposing the series to the syndication markets, even they were surprised by the strength of the reaction. "When we told them," begins Michael Webster (Vice President of Television Animation Production), "that we had 65 half-hours of quality Disney animation, they went crazy. We cleared 87 percent of the country on the names Disney and *Duck Tales*."

That was two years ago. Disney needed that much lead time in order to produce the series. "Then came the great glut," moans Webster. "Suddenly, there was TV-syndicated animation on everywhere, and we were going to fall right into the middle of an already over-crowded market. The only thing we had to separate ourselves from the rest of the shows was that *Duck Tales* were adventure stories without



Disney has farmed animation out of the U.S. to Tokyo Movie Shinsha (and more recently subcontracted to Korea), but *Duck Tales* still has some of the most dazzling and fluid animation seen on TV.

All Duck Tales Art Copyright 1987 Walt Disney Company

violence, without monsters, without ray guns, without all of the typical trappings of an animated action series."

In order to compete in the TV market, Disney is relying on its reputation for producing quality shows. Quality doesn't come without a price, however, and Disney Television is less concerned with immediate profits than with concentrating on producing a show which will last through the years.

"Eventually, we expect the series to make money," says Webster. "But there is no money right now. We are not deficiting [i.e., deficit financing; spending more than receiving, with the aim of making up these losses later] the pictures, but we are making them for the license fees. We are putting *everything* on the screen. We take the license fees, spend what we have to here and overseas, and if we break even, we've done our job."

Webster makes no secret of the fact that *all* of the animation for *Duck Tales* is done overseas. "The office here in Los Angeles is a pre-production/post-production house," he explains. "We write all the scripts, record all the shows, do the storyboards, character designs, color keys, key backgrounds, layouts, shot timing and direction. We put it all together in a great big package and send it to Tokyo (Tokyo Movie Shinsha). They animate it, paint it and shoot it. Tokyo works on each 22-minute episode for about 12 weeks.

"Then, they send it back to us. We call for retakes, and in a couple of weeks, the retakes are done and sent back. In the meantime, we have a team of editors who cut the pictures together, format it, get it to proper length, cut the effects and music, take it to another house and dub it or mix it, and finally transfer it to videotape with scene to scene color correction from the negative. And it's ready to go. It takes about 25 weeks for each 22-minute episode. This means we ship a show a week to Tokyo and they get a show a week back to us. The amount of work is astronomical."

With the exception of two sets of four- and five-part episodes, the stories are *not* serialized. Each day's program is complete unto itself. A viewer can tune in on any day of the week and see a complete story.

The production values, too, are impressive. The animation lives up to Disney standards by being far superior to any other syndicated or made-for-Saturday-morning TV fare. Nevertheless, it isn't Disney feature quality animation. Yet, backgrounds are colorful and highly detailed. Layouts are interesting and often quite complicated. Effects animation is well-used and designed to work with the characters instead of just to dazzle the viewer. The characters even have shading and shadows in some scenes.

Though they have preserved the feel of the Barks stories, Webster emphasizes that *Duck Tales* "is *not* the Barks comics come to life." Many of the traditional characters have been retained. Donald Duck is missing (he makes brief cameo appearances from time to time), while Uncle Scrooge and boys face their traditional bad guys, the Beagle Boys, as well as that second richest money-grubber Flintheart Glomgold and the slinky sorceress, Magica De Spell. Other Barks secondary characters include wacky inventor Gyro Gearloose (sadly, without his little helper with the light bulb head) and Gladstone Gander, who obnoxiously flaunts his unfailing good luck to Scrooge's eternal frustration.

New characters created for the series include Launchpad McQuack, a combination of Dudley Do-Right and Evel Knievel, and his young assistant Doofus, who Webster describes as "a waddling advertisement to the greatness of Launchpad McQuack. Doofus, like Huey, Dewey and Louie, is a member of Junior Woodchucks, though he specializes in out-of-the-ordinary merit badges, like Underwater Beekeeping or Jell-O Sculpture. He is a computer nerd, without the saving grace of a computer."

Some of the adventures, too, are close adaptations of Barks' originals, such as: "Back to the Klondike," in which Scrooge finds his first fortune and encounters Glittering Goldie, the only female he ever loved; "Earthquack," in which Gyro constructs a giant shock-absorber to correct the fault beneath the money bin and discovers the land of the Terry Fermy, where the national sport is causing earthquakes; and "Micro-Ducks from Outer Space," in which our heroes are shrunk to ant-size by the technology of very tiny extra-terrestrials.

New stories suggest the spirit of Barks. "Much Ado About Scrooge" has Scrooge tricked into searching for *MacDuck*, the lost play of William Drakespeare, on an island haunted by the ghosts of the Bard's characters. In "The Lost Crows of Genghis Khan," the Ducks meet a Himalayan bandit and the abominable snowman. As a "Hero for Hire," Launchpad stops working for Uncle Scrooge to go into the hero business fulltime, only to be tricked into committing crimes for the Beagle Boys.

Viewer response has been favorable. Within the first few weeks after the new series premiered, it quickly became the most popular syndicated animation series ever. Disney's multi-million dollar, two-year gamble has paid off. In fact, the company is now adding one syndicated series, *Chip and Dale's Rescue Rangers*, in fall 1989, while another new animated program, spotlighting *The New Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, is already making its appearance on the Disney Channel. Thirty more new episodes of *Duck Tales* are in production for possible second season broadcast. A pair of two-hour *Duck Tales* specials, introducing new characters, will air in primetime during November 1988 and February 1989.

"We are offering an alternative," Michael Webster concludes, "to all the programs that rely on zap, bang and kill. We have stories with some meaning, and we have characters who are very well developed. With *Duck Tales*, I think we have something that kids can relate to, understand and enjoy." ■

Many of the stories take Scrooge and the boys in search of lost treasures in geographically remote and fantastical locations.

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The Triumphant Return of Daffy Duck!

The fearless fowl raises heck in his first theatrical adventures in years.

By DAVID HUTCHISON

"Daffy Duck, Paranormalist At Large. Need goblins gobbled, UFOs KO'd, aliens alienated, vampires evaporated and monsters remonstrated? Just call 555-5925. Remember that's the same as dialing 555-KWAK."

On November 20, 1987, the first Looney Tunes theatrical short produced by Warner Bros. since 1969 debuted at half-a-dozen Los Angeles and four New York area theaters. "The Duxorcist" stars Daffy Duck, celebrating his 50th anniversary this year, as a wise-cracking paranormalist ("Ghouls R Us") who has to cope with a demonically possessed seducktress.

Produced at a reported cost of $200,000, "The Duxorcist" is a marked departure from the current practice of storyboarding a cartoon in the United States and shipping timing sheets and boards to the Orient for animation, inking, painting and camera. From the famous opening bull's-eye Warners' logo to the trademark "That's All Folks!" ending, this cartoon proudly proclaims its "Made in Burbank" credit line.

"The Duxorcist" picks up the sharp comic timing and sophistication of the original Warners cartoons exactly where their famous predecessors at Termite Terrace (the Warner Bros. animation unit's building) left off many years ago. Produced by Steven S. Greene, this new Daffy Duck adventure was written and directed by the team of Greg Ford and Terry Lennon. Prior to joining Warners, Ford built a reputation as a writer, film curator and animation critic, while Lennon is a highly experienced animator.

However, knowledgeable as Ford was about cartoon history and criticism, he had never actually made one. Consequently, he describes his experience in stepping across from the theater seat to the production desk as "unbelievable."

"Since I come from a critical and historical background," Ford explains, "as a director, I had to train myself not to think in terms of other styles, but to go with what worked at the moment. I couldn't think about Chuck Jones' Daffy, or Bob Clampett's or Friz Freleng's, but I had to think of just Daffy Duck and what would work for us in this situation. It was a big hurdle for me to get over. I had to learn that the Duck does exist independently of all his directors."

Since the new cartoon's debut, the return of Warner Bros. to theatrical cartoon shorts has been hailed by *Newsweek*, critics Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, the *New York Daily News* and others. "The response has been very good," affirms Ford, "especially since this cartoon is just an experiment. Basically, what we set out to do was to make a cartoon that was funny. The natural temptation for the studio after all these years would have been to make the ultimate Daffy Duck cartoon, but instead we decided to create a cartoon, as if this was one of many."

The credits at the end of "The Duxorcist" go on for a good deal longer than the credits of a 1950s cartoon, but Ford argues that the artists should be recognized. "We had a very mixed group of people working on 'The Duxorcist.' The age range is 20 to 90. Brenda Banks is in her late 30s and was among the first wave of people from Cal Arts. She has worked for Ralph Bakshi and is very good. Frans Vischer, who has just gotten out of Cal Arts, is a terrifyingly good animator; he is the *enfant terrible* of the group and is now working over at Disney on *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*? Norman McCabe is a former director of Daffy Duck cartoons and was one of the earliest animators under Bob Clampett in the late '30s.

The secret for a successful exorcism is to keep the spirits amused. "Did you hear the one about the girl who didn't pay her exorcism bill? She was repossessed!"

"Our layout artist was Robert Givens, who also goes back pretty far. He did character designs on 'A Wild Hare' (1940) and has done layouts for Chuck Jones on and off right through the '50s and then on Bob McKimson cartoons. Richard Thomas has been doing backgrounds at Warners for years, although he did some very well known work on *Sleeping Beauty* for Disney. He goes as far back as doing the backgrounds of 'Porky in Wackyland' (1938), and was also pretty much associated with the Clampett unit at first, and

later, the McKimson unit at Warners. Thomas and Clampett were best friends; they went to high school together. Alan Bodner, Thomas' assistant, is relatively young at 31.

"You know, animation seems to have *skipped* a generation," muses Ford. "I find that the best animators around are either very young or very old. The guys that were there in the beginning just stayed there until they were old men. Now, there's a new generation of younger artists, but the middle generation seems to be missing.

"The animation which you see being done today is a new wave in the sense that these cartoons are being done by people who have a historical sense of animation.

(continued on page 60)

Daffy Duck soon discovers that the real problem isn't monsters in the microwave or bats in the blender, but a demonically-possessed damsel in distress.

All Illustrations Art: Copyright 1987 Warner Bros., Inc.

THE TOMB OF DUCKULA

By
DANIEL DICKHOLTZ &
EDDIE BERGANZA

Egad! An international conspiracy brings a monstrous mallard to life!

***Duckula* took form as a series only after Nickelodeon and Cosgrove Hall chose to rescue Danger Mouse's vampiric opponent.**

Don't let any screwy rabbits tell you otherwise. According to animators, *"It's Duck Season!"*

They've gone beyond hanging around in Chinese restaurants. They're filling the airwaves. They're taking over.

Scary, isn't it?

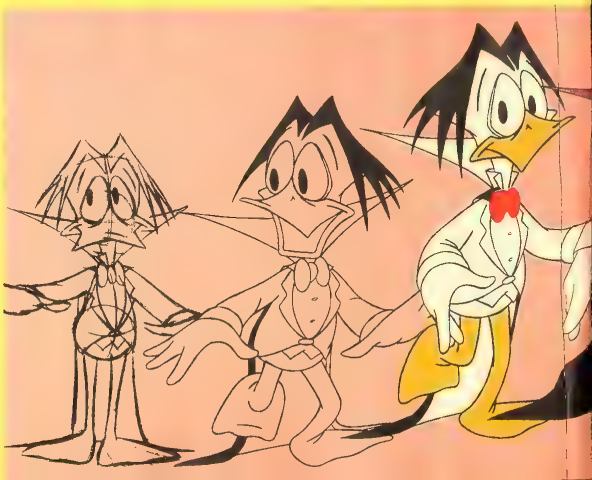
And it's about to get worse. A vampire duck has just hatched somewhere in Transylvania.

"Duckula's a vampire, but he doesn't *want* to be a vampire," says director Chris Randall. "I mean, he was born a vampire, but he really wants to be normal. He wants to be modern or what he *thinks* of as modern. He doesn't like all this tradition of vampirism and fussiness and cobwebs. Duckula wants to get away from it, but he can't really because that's his security."

Actually, Count Duckula was escaping from his arch-rival Danger Mouse when England's Cosgrove Hall Productions and America's Nickelodeon cable channel saved the misguided mallard from his life of deviltry, giving him a TV series all his own.

"He was a *real* vampire in *Danger Mouse*," the director notes, "but that seemed to interest Nickelodeon and it seemed a good starting point. We took the name and his general look and built a world, his castle and his servants around him. And there was a definite idea to make its visual style different. So, if you walked into the room, and either *Duckula* or *Danger Mouse* was on TV, you would know which one you were watching."

Considering the lord of duckness' cavalcade of characters, it's doubtful *Duckula* will be confused with anything else, but *Monty Python* and *Bullwinkle* trapped in a blender. Taking care of Duckula are the butler Igor, who is embarrassed by his master's tendency toward artichokes, rather than meatier substances, and dear, huge, stupid Nanny. Armed with his trusty



All Duckula Art: Copyright 1987 Cosgrove-Hall Productions, Ltd.

wooden stake gun, Dr. Von Goosewing, self-proclaimed "Greatest Vampire Hunter," is anything but. And there are many other odd looking creatures hanging around Castle Duckula.

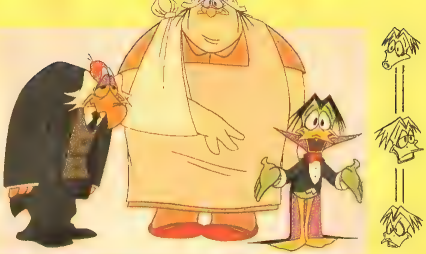
But aside from making them look funny, Cosgrove Hall has taken great pains in making them sound funny as well.

"Although they're all Transylvanian, their voices have been cast to what their personalities are," Randall observes. "Igor was the old butler who had been in the family for years, and Jack May, his voice, has been mostly a radio actor who seemed right. Nanny is Brian Trueman, one of the writers. He did a few impressions as a guide so we could find an actress to do the voice. We never found one, so he's doing it. The most difficult one was Duckula.

"We didn't want him to sound quacking like a duck, but at the same time, it had to come from his personality. In the end, strangely enough, the clue came from Jack Lemmon.

"It was desired that we have an American voice," the director reveals. "We were a little bit against that at first because we thought it was an *English* situation. But then, it seemed being an American would suit Duckula's personality. We tried many American actors and it didn't work. David Jason, who used to do *Danger Mouse*, came up with this Jack Lemmon imitation, and that was it.

"In his early films, Lemmon would go from being very enthusiastic to very petulant, and that seemed to be what Duckula does. Duckula is all keen and then he gets all depressed. Once we got that feeling, we were on our way. Writing dialogue seemed to go very easily after that, whereas before, we were finding him difficult to write for as a character."



All Duckula Art: Courtesy Nickelodeon

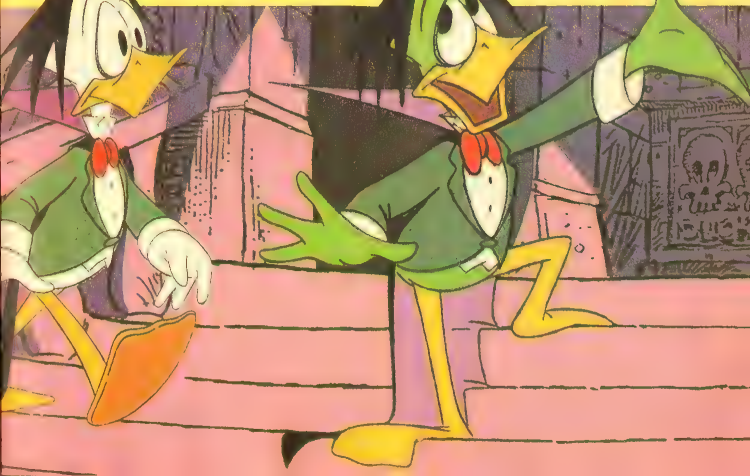
With retainers like a conventional, if maniacal, butler and a featherbrained, musclebound nanny, what's a hip vampire duck to do?

Yet one might find it difficult to accept a show featuring a vampire, albeit a vegetarian one, vying for TV time with so many other, reputedly wholesome and moral animated series like *Masters of the Universe*.

"People always tell you about the pro-social values in shows like *He-Man*. There aren't *any* pro-social values in *He-Man*," complains *Duckula* executive producer John Hambley. "It's a show about violence, and we don't make shows about violence. We set out to do a top-class cartoon series, which is funny, entertaining, non-violent."

Does that mean that a series that draws some of its atmosphere, according to Randall, from *Nosferatu* and the old Universal horror films actually has a moral at the end? Does a program like this—where Igor can grumble about wanting to tear his own head off, where a flying knife might cut someone's bread only because it missed the person's throat—really have a message for its audience?

"No," admits Chris Randall, "but you can always *find* a message, can't you? I don't know. 'Don't get your ketchup mixed up with your blood?'" ■



The PHANTOM Fanatic

By DAVID McDONNELL, DANIEL DICKHOLTZ & EDDIE BERGANZA

Most people wouldn't want to deal with the Hulk since he became a garrulous grey gargoyle. However, Peter David doesn't mind keeping a monthly appointment with the formerly jolly jade giant. When he can, that is. After all, David's time has been taken up lately with his novels, weaving The Web of Spider-Man, *seeking Justice and even following in the footsteps of Lee Falk's "Ghost Who Walks."*

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Hulk Art: Trademark & Copyright 1808 Marvel Entertainment Group. All rights reserved. All Hulk Art: Todd McFarlane

David pays homage to one of his favorite scenes from *ALIENS* when the Hulk learns the advantage of packing a gun.

COMICS SCENE: On *Hulk*, you seem to play around a great amount with the narration.

PETER DAVID: I'm taking turns. I have one with Betty Banner's point-of-view, I had one with the Hulk's. Issue #343 is Rick Jones' point-of-view, which is lots of fun. Rick Jones is a *terrific* character. This guy has seen *everything*. This is someone nothing, I mean *nothing*, should faze. So, it's like, "Galactus is showing up to destroy the world!" "Oh, really?" Also, he has loads of continuity. There's one point where he's being attacked by giant robots, and he's thinking, "What would Captain Mar-Vell do in a situation like this? He used to fight giant robots all the time. Then, I remember. Marv's dead. It isn't encouraging."

CS: What's happening with Betty?

DAVID: We have had a bizarre triangle for 25 years: Bruce Banner, Betty and the Hulk. So, issue #344 is, I think, the best *Hulk* story I've ever written. We get Bruce and Betty back together, they have this discussion, and Betty realizes she has gone as far with Bruce as she could. She sits down, and Bruce asks, "Why are you sitting there?" She says, "Well, we're going to wait until the Sun sets, and then, the Hulk and I are going to chat." And Betty finally has it out with the Hulk, which she has never done before. The Hulk and Betty finally come to terms with each other. We have big plans for her.

CS: Are you going to keep Clay Quartermain around?

DAVID: Clay will be around until issue #346, then he'll be in the *SHIELD* mini-series. Issue #345 is the double-sized climax to the Gamma Bomb storyline, and #346 is the wrap-up where Clay has to testify before Congress and explain just what he has been doing for the past year. We do a whole Ollie North riff. We got medals and everything! And there is such a massive groundswell of support for him that people start a "Clay Quartermain for President" campaign. You're going to see little T-shirts saying, "Clay's OK," that kind of thing. I can't say anything past #346 because we are going to confuse and terrify and fascinate readers all over the country, maybe even the world. Then again, maybe not.

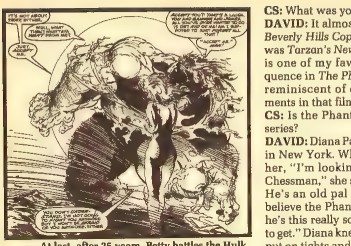
CS: Well, what can you say about your work on *The Phantom* for DC?

DAVID: *The Phantom*, to put all the facts in order, is a four-issue mini-series, drawn by Joe Orlando and inked by Dennis Janke. Mike Gold and Bob Greenberger are tag-team editing it.

The Phantom is the oldest costumed character that I can think of. He pre-dates Superman. He pre-dated Lois Lane, but Superman doesn't know about that yet. [*Laughter.*] The great thing about the Phantom is that there's literally *nobody* else like him, and what I've tried to do in the series is to try and hit on all the things that make him utterly unique. He's the only one who runs around with a wolf. You have the whole setup in the jungle: Skull Cave, the pygmies, the two rings and Phantom Head Peak. There's the generational aspect; the fascinating thing about it is you have 21 generations of fanatics.

What I'm doing is telling two stories simultaneously. The current Phantom, the

The "Ghost Who Walks" strikes more than terror into his friend's killers, pawns of the 20th century Chessman.


HE WON'T ABOUT HIS BETTY!
HE'S NOT WHAT I EXPECTED! HE'S A LOT SMALLER THAN I'D EXPECT!
HE'S NOT EVEN GREEN!
QUIET, DEAR!
BECAUSE YOU'VE TAUGHT A LESSON TO THE BULLIES WHO'VE BEEN TORMENTING YOU! YOU'VE PROVED YOURSELF TO THE BOY YOU'RE IN LOVE WITH!
I KNOW ALL ABOUT IT, DEAR!
YOU DON'T EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT YOU'RE GOING TO GET MARRIED AND LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER, DO YOU?

At last, after 25 years, Betty battles the Hulk (so to speak)!

21st, is going through an adventure. While this is happening, his ward, Rex, is reading an adventure of the 13th Phantom as written by the 14th. The real kicker is that the 13th Phantom is fighting this group of pirates, brothers called the Chessmen, and the modern-day Phantom is fighting their descendants—also named Chessman.

Now, this guy's a respected businessman. He is into dozens of really shady things, but the law can't touch him because everything is apparently on the up-and-up. The local authorities don't quite realize just how scummy this guy is, and the Phantom has to come to New York to track him down. So, we have one of my favorite elements, the fish-out-of-water.

CS: Might bringing the Phantom to the city trivialize the character?

DAVID: To bring someone down to earth, to deal with realistic concerns, is not to automatically say that you're going to diminish the character. What I'm saying is that certain things are taken into consideration in portraying the Phantom against a realistic background. The Phantom is going on a plane to New York. "What sir? You want to bring your wolf and guns? Sure. No problem." No! They take away his guns and make him check Devil, whom they assume is a dog, in baggage. That's why he's stopped by a cop and harassed about having Devil on a leash. You would think that in New York, this guy's in deep trouble, but he handles himself fine. The thing about the Phantom is that he is so much bigger than life that no matter where he is, he towers above his surroundings.

CS: What was your inspiration for that?

DAVID: It almost wound up looking like *Beverly Hills Cop*, but my real inspiration was *Tarzan's New York Adventure*, which is one of my favorites. There is one sequence in *The Phantom* that is extremely reminiscent of one of my favorite moments in that film.

CS: Is the Phantom's lady in this mini-series?

DAVID: Diana Palmer is in there. She lives in New York. When the Phantom says to her, "I'm looking for this man, Charles Chessman," she says, "Oh, Chuck? Sure!" He's an old pal of hers and she doesn't believe the Phantom when he says, "No, he's this really scummy guy that I'm here to get." Diana knew the Phantom before he put on tights and went to live in the jungle for good, so she's not afraid to speak her mind. She's not a shrinking violet by any means, which is very much in the spirit of the way Lee Falk puts her across.

There *is* an exchange between the Phantom and Diana, where Diana says to him, "Look, Kit . . ." His real name is Kit Walker. All the Phantoms are named Kit Walker. It makes it easy to pass on the monogrammed towels and luggage. [Laughter.] That's good. Put that in there and Falk's going to go, "Monogrammed luggage?" Anyway, Diana says, "Look, you are not in the jungle. You're not chasing around a wild animal that's terrorizing villagers. This is not your home. Please go home before you get hurt." She walks out, and the Phantom says to Devil, "She doesn't understand. I *am* home. Whether it has bamboo and vines or concrete and steel girders, a jungle is still a jungle. This one just has more dangerous animals, that's all." That really sums up my whole approach to the Phantom.

CS: What are some of the differences between the 13th Phantom and the modern one?

DAVID: Well, the 13th Phantom is shorter and wider, which is one of the reasons I picked him; he's physically different. These three pirates capture him and put him through a sequence of events which is so thoroughly humiliating to the entire Phantom line that he becomes someone with a *very* hard edge to him. He feels that the entire future of the line is resting on this humiliation being *completely* erased, and he goes to extraordinary lengths to do so.

Since he has a son, he has a very great sense of the continuity of the Phantom line; he sees the next one. Also, he's older, he's slowing down, he's not as strong as he once was. He's trying to do what he was once capable of and he can't, and he's fighting against that. The modern-day Phantom is in his prime, so he's not thinking all that much of his own mortality. People who are older, suddenly, death doesn't seem that far off.

CS: What sort of research did you do?

DAVID: I read the first paperback, which is literally all you need to know if you're going to write the Phantom. Everything you need is in there: the entire origin, references to chronology, that kind of thing. King Features is a wonderful licensor to work with. They provided us with about 50 to 60 pages worth of stuff.

As a slight aside, the syndicate wrote and said, "Now, if you're doing a story about the 13th Phantom, keep in mind that his years in office were 1780 to 1811." I went, "Holy shit!" I know that if I had written to them and said, "By the way, when was the fifth Phantom?" they could tell me. It's a testament to the syndicate's incredible cooperation and Lee Falk's incredible detail.

CS: Now, if this mini-series sells, would you want to script a regular *Phantom* series?

DAVID: No, I would *not*. Aside from the fact that I have more work than is humanly possible, I conceived the story as a *four*-issue series. In those four issues, I did everything I wanted to do with the Phantom. God knows there's much more that could be done, but I hit all the things I wanted to hit: the generational aspect, the pursuit of justice no matter what it takes, the parallel storylines of how justice never changes and evil never changes, they both just get different faces. I've done all that in four issues, so I have no desire to go back. This is something I haven't done with any other character thus far. I have not come in and said, "Well, I've got a great idea for four issues and then I'm out of here." Lee Falk has been doing this for 50 years, and I have no end of admiration for him.

A murder tears the Phantom away from his old haunts for the first—and possibly final—time.

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Blasts From the Past

Cracking open the bloody pulps, Denny O'Neil introduces The Shadow to "Hitler's Astrologer" & brings Doc Savage back to the future.

By WILL MURRAY

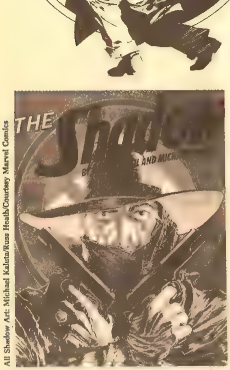
For award-winning DC Comics scripter Denny O'Neil, it must seem, as someone once joked, like *deja vu* all over again.

A decade ago, fresh from his critically acclaimed work on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, O'Neil took on the task of scripting the classic Street & Smith pulp hero, The Shadow. Although well received, this early DC Comics *Shadow* never caught on in those pre-direct market days and was cancelled after 14 issues. Now, with DC's newest version of *The Shadow* one of the hot titles of the '80s, O'Neil has reteamed with his partner on the original book, artist Michael Kaluta, for a Shadow graphic novel, *Hitler's Astrologer*. But there's a twist: It's being released by Marvel!

"It has been two-and-a-half years in the making," O'Neil reveals. "The genesis was an editor at Marvel, Larry Hama, wanted to do it, and he managed to convince the people in charge then. His basic idea was that Kaluta and Berni Wrightson and I would do it. Then, there was the game of musical inkers. Berni, because of illness, became unavailable. Terry Austin, who was on the project for a short time, became unavailable, and finally Larry Hama, as one of the last things he did as a Marvel editor, gave the assignment to Russ Heath. It will be an interesting thing to see because Mike is so emotional and instinctive and Russ tends to be very linear and hard-edged.

"It is a story that has some roots in fact," O'Neil explains. "The basic idea is that The Shadow busts up a Nazi gang in Yorkville in 1941, and through that, discovers that Adolph Hitler's astrologer has a daughter. He then decides to use her to infiltrate the higher echelons of the Nazi party and influence Hitler's decisions. There is some historical evidence that Hitler believed in astrology. It's not violating historical speculation to say that Hitler would have had a astrological advisor. Using that, we constructed a story that answers the question: Why didn't Hitler continue on into Russia when he could have won that battle?"

Hitler's Astrologer is actually the second attempt to produce a Shadow graphic novel. In 1979, Fantagraphics announced one called *Dragonshadows* that was to have been drawn by Kaluta and scripted by Harlan Ellison. But the option lapsed before the project could be completed—a fate that nearly befell Marvel's version when DC unexpectedly acquired the rights to publish a Shadow mini-series two years ago. For several months, this



All Shadow Art: Michael Kaluta/Russ Heath/Courtesy Marvel Comics

By playing the Shadow as "an impersonal force," O'Neil "got around his not paying attention to due process."

According to O'Neil, humanity is for the other characters, not The Shadow.

HARRY VINCENT--KEEP WATCHING THE FRONT EXIT. IT IS UNLIKELY THEY'LL KEEP MISS BAUR THERE LONG, TONIGHT IS OBVIOUSLY THE TRANSPORT NIGHT.
DO NOT ATTEMPT ENTRY. THERE'S A HIGH POWER TRANSMITTER IN THAT BUILDING. A TRANSMITTER I WOULD RATHER THEY DIDN'T DESTROY. I'LL BE THERE SOON.
STAY ON THE LINE FOR BURBANK.
15

All Shadow Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987 The Condé Nast Publications Inc.

Cover: Art: Walter M. Baumhofer/Street & Smith/Courtesy Will Murray

While O'Neil admits he hasn't retained everything from the old days, he does plan to hang onto "the camaraderie and the high adventure" of the original series.

All Doc Savage Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987 The Conde Nast Publications Inc. Used under License.

Doc may have been "the best man alive in 1945," but readers will have to wait for his regular series to see how he handles the '80s.

completed project languished in legal limbo until the situation could be resolved in Marvel's favor.

"It is an odd way to split up a license," O'Neil admits. "One company gets to do graphic novels and the other company gets to do comic books." If the Marvel graphic novel is a success, O'Neil won't be involved in any sequel because he is currently under exclusive contract to DC.

"It's a big, mysterious project as far as we're concerned," he says. "I haven't seen a *single* page of artwork. But I hope Marvel's Shadow graphic novel sells like hotcakes because one possible result would be the reprinting of the stuff that Mike Kaluta and I did at DC. I wouldn't mind seeing that on good paper."

In the meantime, O'Neil will have his hands full adapting another Street & Smith pulp hero currently owned by Conde Nast. For with the brisk sales of his four-issue *Doc Savage* mini-series for DC, a regular monthly comic is being planned for summer release.

"If all goes well, I will write the first six issues," O'Neil explains. "After that, it's negotiable, depending on what my schedule is. I don't really see that I'll have time to do more than that, but you never know."

No artist team has yet been selected but O'Neil doubts that the mini-series team of brothers Andy and Adam Kubert will be back. As far as specific storylines go, O'Neil is still mulling them over, but he is willing to drop hints about direction and theme.

"The seeds were planted in the mini-series," he says. "The continuing love-hate relationship between Doc and his grandson and the development of the new agents. And the conflict between them and the old agents that mirrors that of Doc and his grandson. Vast differences and yet an underlying mutual respect on both sides.

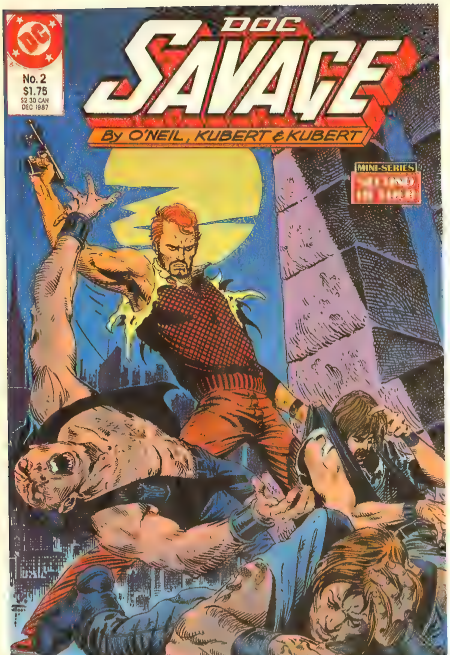
"I have technological gimmicks in mind. I was looking over the old Doc Savage stuff. It was always state-of-the-art-plus technology. So, obviously we will lean heavily on that. I have been doing a lot of reading on computers and things. I see Doc as an anachronism. However, he's an anachronism who would be like a kid in a toy shop. My God, microchips, satellites, all that stuff as the world's greatest scientist he would have thought about, but now, it's a *reality*."

One original pulp character not seen in the mini-series was Doc's popular and feisty cousin, Patricia Savage. While non-committal about any plan to explain her fate, O'Neil laughs, "The reason she wasn't in the mini-series was there wasn't room for her."

Another set of characters who definitely will not return are the unseen aliens whose teleportation device was responsible for bringing Doc Savage into the modern world without having aged.

"That was a McGuffin we used to accomplish the update," O'Neil explains. "Our original idea was to have Doc die in 1949 and have his brain preserved and transplanted into the body of an Indian. We had second and third and fourth thoughts about that. We squelched it and came up with a *better* gimmick."

Some fans of the original Lester Dent Doc Savage novels are puzzled as to why a writer who so faithfully adapted The Shadow a decade ago would opt to update the Man of Bronze into the '80s. The answer is disarmingly simple.



Clark Savage III takes on a gang of street thugs and ends his chances of becoming the next *Doc Savage*.

"It was part of the assignment," O'Neil says flatly. "I don't know if Conde Nast or DC made the decision. It was just handed me as part of the package. So, the problem became a technical one of *how* to accomplish that. I was very aware of the fact that Doc Savage had many loyal fans out there to whom he is very important. I'm also aware that I can't cater slavishly to those fans' interests because I would do dull stories. Basically, I had to go for my audience."

In that respect, O'Neil succeeded beyond his wildest expectations. The Doc Savage mini-series was one of last summer's bestselling comics.

"The mail on *Doc Savage* seems to be generally favorable, with the occasional agonized scream of protest from someone who feels we were not faithful to the sacred writ," he adds. "I recognized going in that that was going to happen. I can't be faithful to *everything* Lester Dent did. I worked hard at trying to be faithful to the spirit. I didn't make fun of the characters. I tried to deliver a wildly extravagant plot, but a *real* plot. And to deliver what I saw as the concerns of the original series, which were the camaraderie, the high adventure and the boundless faith in technology. That part is particularly dated, but I saw no reason not to put it in."

One departure from the spirit of the pulps certain to cause controversy was the revelation at the mini-series' end that one of Doc's original aides, Long Tom Roberts, was a traitor.

All Doc Savage Mini-Series Art: Adam & Andy Kubert/DC Comics Inc.

In a shocking scene "too cramped" for O'Neil's tastes, Doc reveals Long Tom's betrayal.

"I had many reasons for wanting to do that," O'Neil says. "One of them was—and oh boy, is this going to sound pretentious, but it's not my idea, it's something I picked up—the Christ aspects of Doc Savage. We constructed the story so that, in effect, he died and was resurrected. I wanted to carry that one step further. My regret was that those scenes were too cramped."

With both *Doc Savage* and *The Shadow* being published under the same roof for the first time since the heyday of Street & Smith, the possibility of a dream team-up of both characters looms large.

"That would be wonderful," O'Neil agrees. "But there may be many reasons why it's impossible. I know we can't do a Batman meets The Shadow story. We were told that. But since both *Doc Savage* and *The Shadow* are Conde Nast properties, I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be possible. It certainly would be a nifty thing to do."

And what about a new comics version of Street & Smith's third top hero, The Avenger, whom O'Neil also scripted for DC Comics in the '70s?

"I guess it could happen," O'Neil speculates. "The thing that would *make* it happen is if we do *Doc Savage* as a monthly and it starts selling like *The X-Men*. I don't know that I would be interested in doing it, though."

As perhaps the only comics writer to have written both Doc Savage and The Shadow, O'Neil says he does not prefer one over the other.

(continued on page 60)

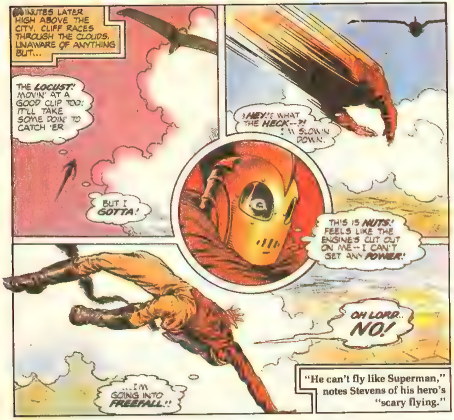
Finally Blasting Off...

The Rocketeer™

After several misfires, creator Dave Stevens and filmmaker Bill Dear may be getting the sky king off the cinematic launchpad.

All Rocketeer Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987 Dave Stevens

Who will fill Betty's er, shoes in the movie? Stevens has a "couple of gals" in mind.



"He can't fly like Superman," notes Stevens of his hero's "scary flying."

WHAT A MAN!
WOW!
WOW!
WOW

the Rocketeer, is that he's a regular guy, the key to Dave Stevens' popularity is that *he's* one, too. He's an ordinary guy—except for the extraordinary talent evidenced in *The Rocketeer*, his acclaimed comic serial set in pre-war 1938. The opening episodes introduced Secord, a Los Angeles barnstormer who discovers a rocket pack developed by the government. With the help of some hand controls and a helmet, Cliff Secord becomes the high-flying Rocketeer and stumbles into intrigue involving everyone from the Nazis to American undercover agents wanting to retrieve the pack.

"Cliff is his own foil. He's basically self-interested. He gets himself in more trouble than anyone else could. But there are some villains coming up, pretty substantial villains," Stevens reveals. "There are a couple of people close to Cliff who go bad—a little close-to-home villainy."

The boards for the current adventures of Cliff and Betty are spread out all over Stevens' studio, three installments due out from Comico this year.

Stevens' life of late has been far from that of a regular guy. It has become the same kind of hurtling excitement that fans have come to love in his comic. The adventure began when Stevens created the strip as a back-up feature for Pacific Comics' *Starslayer* in 1981.

"The influences for *The Rocketeer* were the old serials and the early aviation films like *Ceiling Zero* and *Wings*," he explains. "The characters and the story only surfaced when I was asked to come up with something by Steve Schanes at Pacific. I didn't know what I was going to do, but then it came together—the influences and the interests—in the Rocketeer.

"I had a pretty good idea it would be well-received," Stevens confesses, "but I didn't know how *widely* it would be received. I didn't think as many people would take to it as they did."

The Rocketeer quickly earned its own title, published by Eclipse Comics after Pacific folded. The individual chapters were collected last year in a popular graphic novel that solidified Stevens' position as one of the top artists in the field.

Not only did the comic attract the attention of critics and fans, but of Hollywood as well. Almost immediately, people wanted to put Cliff Secord's adventures on the screen. The Depresion era flavor, the cinematic drawing, the expressive characters and fantastic situations made the concept a natural for the movies.

"I had been contacted periodically," Stevens relates, "mostly by people who were representing very small independent production companies, though at one time I did have some conversations with Chuck Russell, who had produced *Dreamscape*, and other filmmakers of that stature. But nothing seemed to gel. I was approached in '83 by Steve [House] Miner [FANGORIA #51]. We got along well and he optioned the property for two years, but when the option came up in '85, I let it slide."

"I thought *Rocketeer* should be a movie," states director Bill Dear.

The Rocketeer didn't languish for long, however. Stevens had been busy in the intervening years, producing commercial art. Then, he was approached by screenwriters Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo. The two had just completed their second film for Charles Band's Empire Entertainment when they contacted Stevens about *The Rocketeer*.

"They finally reached me through a friend, though evidently they had been trying to get in touch with me for some time to use me as a storyboard artist," he says. "We met and they gave me copies of their movies, *Trancers* and *Zone Troopers*, which I watched and loved. They showed a genuine affection for the time period and the writing had great flavor and great heart."

Bilson and De Meo told Stevens they thought they could interest a major producer in the project, Larry [*48 HRS.*] Gordon. Stevens knew by now that was the kind of clout needed to get the picture launched, and he agreed to let Bilson and De Meo do what they could. The two procured Gordon's commitment to the project, but

Peevy was inspired by *Jonny Quest* creator Doug Wildey, though no one knows who'll play the film role.

several weeks of unproductive meetings with indifferent executives at various disinterested studios followed.

Fate intervened in the form of a note left at the Golden Apple, a Los Angeles comic-book store. One of Golden Apple's patrons that day just happened to be Justin Maestro, director Bill Dear's assistant. While Dear (STARLOG #110) worked on *Harry and the Hendersons*, Maestro searched for possible future projects. *The Rocketeer* caught his attention. He brought a copy back to the office for Dear to read.

"Apparently, the day Bill got it, he read it and tried to get in touch with me—and couldn't," Stevens reveals. "He had Justin drop off a note at Golden Apple, and the owner passed the note along to me, but I didn't pay much attention to it. People are *always* dropping stuff off there for me. I mean, I was interested, but I didn't do anything about it. I didn't know Bill's name.

"So, I didn't put any weight there. I was already involved with Danny and Paul. But a friend urged me to call Bill and have a meeting with him. By then, I had seen 'Mummy Daddy' [Dear's acclaimed installment of *Amazing Stories*] which impressed me. In just a half-hour, he told a

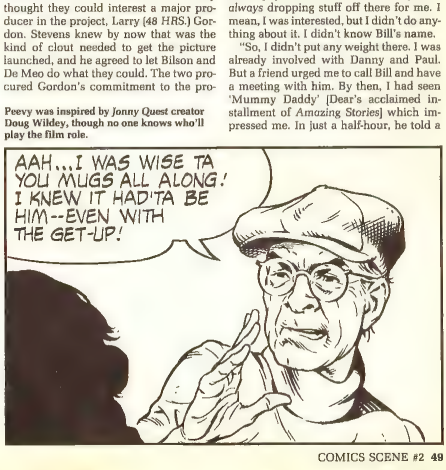


Photo: Ralph Nelson/Copyright 1987 Universal City Studios/Courtesy Bill Dear

Photo: Courtesy Dave Stevens

Having finished his visit with big Harry and the Hendersons, regular guy Bill Dear prepares to guide *The Rocketeer* through his cinematic takeoff.

No, this isn't an advance production shot from *Rocketeer: The Movie*, just the real-life Cliff Secord with Peevy—Dave Stevens and his mentor Doug Wildey.

wonderful little story. The mileage he got from camerawork was something I hadn't seen in a long time. It told me that this guy was an absolutely thorough filmmaker and had real control over all the elements. That's what a good director is all about."

Bill Dear had been equally impressed with Stevens' abilities. "I liked Dave instantly for being able to think up something as fresh as *The Rocketeer*," Dear remarks. "I loved his ability to draw. I used to sit up nights as a kid trying to draw like Wallace Wood from the early *Mads*. I did a lot of growing up reading comics. Good comics, to me, are cinematic. If you think about the way you storyboard a film, with an eye toward dramatics, it's a quality shared by really good comics, like Dave's. I loved the story and the characters, but the magic and drama of *The Rocketeer* is the eye Dave has for visual drama. I thought it *should* be a movie."

The two creators found they shared the same vision for a *Rocketeer* movie adaptation. Stevens wanted Dear to direct, and he accepted.

"We got together with all the people making inquiries [Gordon, Bilson and De Meo] with the idea of making it together—and then, we were a little shocked to find that many of the studios just didn't share the enthusiasm we had," Dear admits. "That's because there's a tendency for studios to want properties 'just like' other movies. *The Rocketeer* isn't 'just like' anything."

Then began the arduous process of getting the deal. Larry Gordon's assistant, Lloyd Levin, was the principal liaison between the creators and the studios. Stevens recalls one week filled with seven separate meetings, each one an exhausting ritual of pitching the concept, relating story ideas and art, and being subjected to the temperamental vagaries of studio executives.

After a few more weeks, after Orion, Universal and other studios had passed, executives at Disney showed positive interest. The negotiations were long and drawn out, in part because each of the artists were individually represented. Finally, in late October 1987, the deal was closed. A *Rocketeer* film was going to be made at Disney.

To me, the idea of a flying man is really exciting," director Bill Dear notes. "It's one of those things you can only do in the movies—though with the advent of the Superman films and their qualitative decline, some of the wind has been taken out of that sail. However, *The Rocketeer* opens up a whole new way to do a flying man. Cliff is not a superhero who flies at will under his own power; he's human, like you and me. But he has the bravado and inclination to take this rocket pack he has found and use it.

"It's not as easy as it looks. We're going to see a real man wrestling with the dilemma of flying. He'll have to face the danger of crashing, putting his life on the line. He does it at first for personal reasons, then he's thrown into an adventure far greater than any he has encountered, and his only hope is to master the pack. His ability to use it gives him the one advantage that enables him to surmount otherwise impossible odds weighing against him.

"We want to do it *very* realistically," Dear elaborates. "He can't fly like Superman, who puts one toe in front of the other and lifts off gracefully. This is scary flying. It can kill you."

"That sense of reality makes it easier for adults to relate to the story," adds Stevens, underlining the greatest stumbling block he and Dear perceive for *The Rocketeer*.

"The biggest question I have is: Do we know too much as a people to allow ourselves to enjoy such a movie?" Dear asks. "Kids can get by almost everything, but adults may find the premise dismissible. Back in the days of Buck Rogers, *Commander Cody* and *Flash Gordon*, the heyday of the serials, we were much more naive. We had not yet stepped on the Moon—things like that were all still in the realm of the fantastic.

"I believe we adults do know too much to accept it. Our biggest challenge then is to make it acceptable, to make adults see the Rocketeer as a real person, as themselves. We never see Superman as ourselves. The success of *The Rocketeer* as a movie depends on the audience believing Cliff is just like them, but faced with a fantastic adventure."

Stevens, officially a co-producer, plans to take an active role in all aspects of the filming while, at the same time, "keeping flurries of everybody's way." He will do some of the designing, but not the storyboarding, though he says, "I'll do some bits and pieces when I have to, something I know should look a certain way. I hope to be on the set every day. I'm going to be as involved as Bill and the writers in my own capacities. I'll do everything I can to help make *The Rocketeer* as close as possible to the movie we want."

It's too early to begin casting, but Bill Dear thinks an unknown is ideal for the role of Cliff Secord. "I'm not being disrespectful when I say 'unknown,'" he remarks. "I mean by that a fellow who has done some pictures and displayed the talent to bring off the role, but doesn't bring with him the layer of a 'star' persona. Cliff has to be a *new* entity—a guy who's not related in the audience's mind to other roles."

However, it's not too early for the artist to voice his confidence in director Bill Dear's ability to bring Stevens' creation to cinematic life. "One of the reasons I sought Bill out was his aesthetic judgment," Stevens says. "I think it's critical—you better damn well be able to trust someone's judgment and be able to breathe a sigh of relief and not worry all the time that they're going to screw it up. I've seen enough of what he has done to know I can just sit back and do my job on the film and not worry about his interpretation of things. I know *The Rocketeer* will be as close to my sensibilities as it can probably be. We have the same vision.

"But don't get me wrong," Dave Stevens states finally. "If it seems to go too far afield, I'll start kicking and screaming." ■

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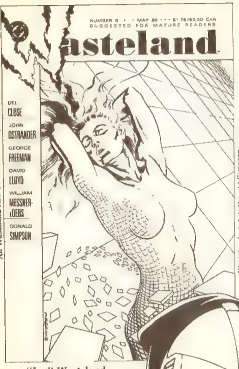


All Wasteland Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987, 1988 DC Comics Inc.

Wasteland as Art: Donald Simpson

"Isn't *Wasteland* a bizarre book?" wonders Ostrander.

"The more I write, the more I'm *able* to write," says John Ostrander.

Ostrander Photo: Courtesy John Ostrander

John Ostrander may not be the busiest writer in comics today, but he's trying. Scripting *Suicide Squad*, *Firestorm* and *Grimjack* every month, as well as co-writing *Wasteland*, the upcoming *Manhunter* and several limited series, puts him up there with the prolific Steve Englehart and Mike Baron.

"And *they're* dropping books!" Ostrander laughs.

The greying, curly-haired playwright-turned-comics scripter was writing numerous features for First Comics in Chicago, when he submitted the proposal to revive *Suicide Squad*. Before he got the go-ahead for that book, however, editor Mike Gold—who had just moved from First to DC—decided to plunge Ostrander head-first into the DC universe.

"The first book I worked on at DC was the *Legends* mini-series," he explains. "Mike's plan was to spin *Suicide Squad* out of *Legends*, which made it an even easier sell."

The modern *Suicide Squad* bears few resemblances to its predecessor, as Ostrander explains how he developed the premise.

Mark Shaw picks up an old secret identity and a new costume when he revives his career as *Manhunter*.

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Too Many Series, Too Little Time

Taking the comics scene by "Firestorm," John Ostrander chronicles the adventures of suicidal super-villains, courageous manhunters and the weirdos of the "Wasteland."

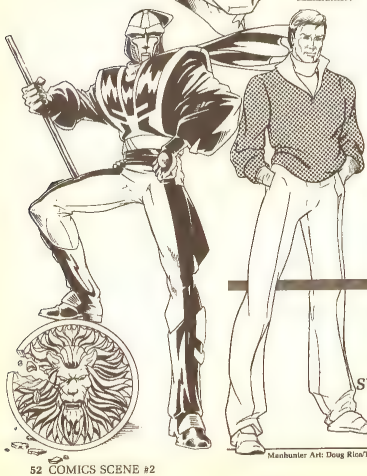
"Who in their right mind belongs to anything called the 'Suicide Squad'? And then it hit me—these are people who *don't* have a choice, and I suddenly got into the villain idea. I had always been a fan of the *Secret Society of Super-Villains*—me and five other people in the world!

"Also, no one was really doing secret missions worldwide, really down-dirty and nasty stuff," he explains, but notes that the current political climate anticipated the clandestine nature of his storylines.

"When I did the *Secret Origins* story of the Suicide Squad, I thought we were climbing way out on a limb, and impugning some pretty nasty stuff. Then, Irangate broke before that issue came out, and it made me look like a piker! I thought we were being daring, and reality made a chump of us!"

True to its title, the Suicide Squad has lost its share of members along the way. "The mortality rate is worse than most groups. We lost Blockbuster in their very first mission, we've had Mindboggler dead, Plastique turned traitor. We let people survive for a while, but as a result of *Doom Patrol*/*Suicide Squad Special*, only one person walked away.

"Everyone has characters they want



Manhunter Art: Doug Rice/Trademark & Copyright 1987 DC Comics Inc.

"I thought we were being daring with the *Secret Origins* story," Ostrander laments. "Reality made a chump of us."

killed off. Reaction to Captain Boomerang ranges from 'Don't you *dare* kill him' to 'I want him *dead* now!' He really *is* despicable, and he enjoys it! As the shrink says, he's a sociopath. I'm a little appalled that he's as popular as he is, and that I enjoy writing him as much as I do! He and Deadshot are probably the two most popular members of the Squad," Ostrander says.

As he speaks, his wife Kim Yale enters the room. Married less than a year, Ostrander jokes that he has no compunctions about his wife working, and explains that they recently collaborated on the *New America* limited series for Eclipse. The two are also working together on the forthcoming *Manhunter* title and a four-issue *Deadshot* series.

"*Deadshot* will deal very heavily with his personal life—who he is, where he comes from, and why he is the way he is. At the end, the facts will be out, but they won't necessarily explain everything," Ostrander says. "There's something about Deadshot that people respond to, an aura of fatality. Some people have detected a streak of nobility, and there seems to be pain that Deadshot doesn't talk about, even in his therapy sessions. And yet, is there something better in him? He *is* a killer."

Ostrander has definite ideas about *Suicide Squad*. "The other thing I wanted to do with *Suicide Squad* was really establish the fact that on their own, these villains, without any superheroes around, are really capable beings who can cause problems," Ostrander notes. "If they're not capable, then Batman, Superman and all the rest are simply bullies beating up on these pathetic wimps, not protecting us from anyone.

"When we used the Penguin, for example, he wasn't a joke. We treated him as having criminal cunning and a streak of ruthlessness. Taking it from that angle, the character is interesting, and a real threat. This way, when the villains go back to their own books, they go back as threats—they *can* win."

He has high praise for penciller Luke McDonnell. "Luke has been doing the best work of his career on this book. I hope everybody saw the Batman-Suicide Squad confrontation. Luke wants to try inking his own work, and so for that issue, I did the full script first, I usually only do plots."

Despite the recent crossovers with both the Doom Patrol and the Justice League, Ostrander has no intention of letting the action slow down, and, in fact, a new—rather unexpected—guest star will join the team. "We have a three-parter where Nightshade goes back to the Nightshade dimension to free her brother, and that goes *real* wrong. We find out what that dimension is, and Nightshade learns more about herself. One of the members is ter-

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FIRST ISSUE!
THESE 8 PEOPLE WILL PUT THEIR LIVES ON THE LINE FOR OUR COUNTRY.
ONE OF THEM WON'T BE COMING HOME!
GRIMJACK
Secret Origins Cover: Luke McDonnell & Bob Smith
Suicide Squad #1: Howard Chaykin
Grimjack Art: Tom Mandrake/Trademark & Copyright 1987 First Comics Inc.

"The mortality rate is higher than most groups," the writer admits.

Only in the world of *Grimjack* could the title character actually be killed off and brought back, new and improved.

SUICIDE SQUAD
OSTRANDER, McDONNELL & LEWIS
SUICIDE SQUAD
All Suicide Squad Art, Trademark & Copyright 1987, 1988 DC Comics Inc.
Suicide Squad #12 Art: Luke McDonnell & Bob Lewis

Deadshot takes aim at a fellow *Suicide Squad* member, even as Ostrander and Yale aim to reveal his past in an upcoming mini-series.

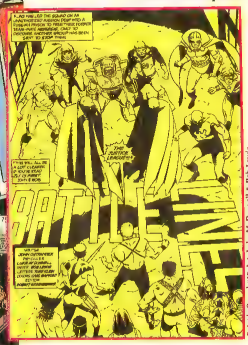
minated, and on the way out, they wind up in the dimension of Shade, the Changing Man! I've been wanting to bring Shade into the Squad," he confesses, "and then we'll start working toward our first annual. We'll finally find out what the group Argent — which we mentioned in Secret *Origins*—is all about. Jihad will be back—nastier than ever — and Captain Boomerang will get his!"

Ostrander is also responsible for the new direction in *Firestorm*, a book he became involved with by filling in on the *Legends* crossover issues. "They needed someone really quick who knew what was happening in *Legends*. I took it not because Firestorm was my favorite character, but because I could explore some of the material lost when *Legends* was reduced from eight to six issues.

"After that, Gerry Conway announced he wasn't returning, and I realized I had gotten interested in the characters. Technically, Firestorm is one of the most powerful persons in the DC universe—so what is he doing fighting mutated wrestlers? Sales were not going well, so I was given a mandate to show everyone the character's potential. I launched into the storyline that culminated in changing in Firestorm into a different character—we haven't *ignored* his past, we've *evolved* him."

The new hero — the result of Ron Raymond merging with a Russian after Martin Stein's apparent death—will prompt an extended Russian storyline to involve the repercussions on Mikhail Arkady, the Soviet half of Firestorm. Also, the Firestorm persona will be coming into its own as a *separate* consciousness.

Colonel Flag's band of bad guys run headlong into their old sparring partners. Needless to say, neither group is happy about this development.



"The new Firestorm is in the process of completing his evolution into a character of his own — he's not Ron, he's not Mikhail—he's completing the maturation of his consciousness," Ostrander says. "The question will be raised: Did Professor Stein die? I will give a definite answer by summertime—I will give people Martin Stein dead or alive.

"I couldn't have written Gerry Conway's *Firestorm*, and there are some people—a very small, but very vocal group —who are very irritated with the changes I've made; they claim I'm ruining *Fire-*

Letting villains like the Penguin join Suicide Squad missions gives Ostrander the chance to show what they're *really* capable of.

storm. But, I've been told that if I hadn't made the changes, Firestorm would probably not be in his own book anymore. Since I've taken over, it has gone up nine sales points—whatever that means."

Considering the recent plots involving Soyuz—the Soviet teenage superhero team—and Stalnoivolk, as well as the Suicide Squad's earlier mission to the Soviet Union, Ostrander admits that Russian storylines have dominated.

"That's happening a great deal at DC in general," he explains, "though we'll be soft-pedaling the Russian stuff as we wrap up the story in *Firestorm*. But, it makes sense that the other major superpower would eventually try to match us—I can't see them wanting a superhero gap, in terms of national security and prestige!

"At first, Joseph Stalin only wanted *one* superhero, Stalnoivolk, who was totally devoted to him. Stalnoivolk's participation in Stalin's purges really soured the Russian society on the idea of using superheroes. But, they've realized that in modern times, they're needed, or national security may be endangered."

Perhaps Ostrander's most controversial book is *Wasteland*, the rather twisted horror anthology co-written by Del Close.

Despite the series' violence, *Grimjack* brought John Ostrander and his wife, Kim Yale, together.

"Isn't *that* a bizarre book?!" he laughs. "Mike Gold figures we won't be a real success until somebody at DC comes to him and wants to see the stories *before* they go out! As the test pilots say, we keep pushing the edge of the envelope—and every time we get away with it, there's a *new* plateau that needs to be tested.

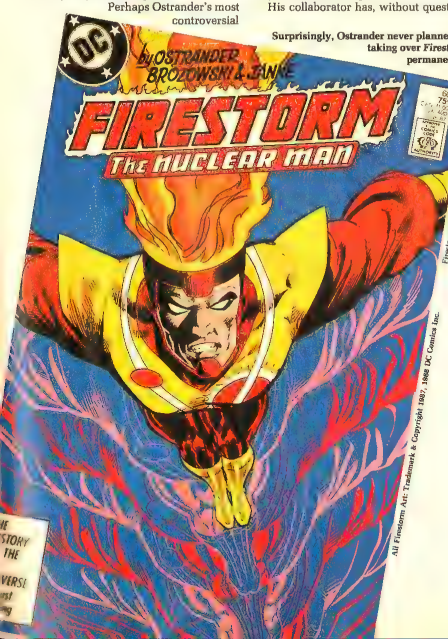
"We're trying to write adult comics, but not by using nudity, violence or language, though they may be in there. With *Wasteland*, the *readers* complete the horror circuit. We start the story, and they complete it within themselves. It's more effective that way, although Mike Gold has been describing it as 'Mad comics for the '80s.' I don't know that I agree, but there is a lot of wigged-out humor—with a death's-head grin right under it. Yuk it up, kids—*Wasteland*'s right outside your door!" Ostrander says with a sinister grin.

His collaborator has, without question, the most incredibly varied background of any comics pro, which will become evident in the autobiographical story that appears in each issue of *Wasteland*. In addition to directing at Second City and *Saturday Night Live* (where he taught—among many others—Bill Murray and John Belushi, as noted in Bob Woodward's *Wired*), Close is an actor (with roles in films ranging from *American Graffiti* to *The Untouchables* and *The Big Town*), a practicing witch and fire-eater who used to celebrate Thanksgiving dinners at home with his cousin, Dwight Eisenhower. Ostrander met Close years ago, when both were in *A Christmas Carol* at Chicago's Goodman Theatre, and Ostrander began studying improv under him.

"It was liberating for me as an actor, but even more so as a writer. The perceptions that Del teaches work terrifically well for a writer. Del's dictum of starting a story in the middle, and going on past the end, works particularly well with comic books. He's not interested in exposition, he wants to know what goes on after 'happily ever after.' The old Stan Lee and Jack Kirby stories would frequently start in the middle of something, and say, 'Hang on, frantic ones—we'll catch up as we go!' That's a reasonably successful way of telling a comic book story.

"Although *Wasteland* is technically a horror anthology, we really have no idea what's going to pop up next. Del's a genius, one of the very few people I can say that of, and we are writing partners in a very real sense. I regard genius as a power of perception and observation, and Del's is unique and very acute. It may not be the only vision of the world that exists, but it's a true vision."

Surprisingly, Ostrander never planned on taking over *Firestorm* permanently.


DC
by OSTRANDER BROZOWSKI & JANKE
FIRESTORM
The NUCLEAR MAN
Firestorm #40 Art: Joe Brozowski & Dick Giordano
All Firestorm Art: Trademark & Copyright 1987, 1988 DC Comics Inc.

"We really have *no* idea what's going to pop up next" in *Wasteland*, Ostrander confesses.

John Ostrander was enjoying a successful career in Chicago as a playwright, authoring *Bloody Bess* among others, when then-First Comics editor Mike Gold put him in comics. "Mike had seen my work as a playwright, and wanted to see how I would work in comics. He gave me a shot and liked what I did, writing back-up features for *Warp*, then *Starslayer*."

Ostrander went on to create *Grimjack*, which ran for nearly a year as the back-up feature in *Starslayer*, and continues in his own book. "We're on our fourth anniversary issue, in the middle of a hotsie-totsie story involving demons and the Dancer, we'll be settling a lot of scores. Counting the back-up stories in *Starslayer*, I've been on the scarfaced hero for five years."

Grimjack also played a pivotal role in Ostrander's personal life. In fact, the character is partially responsible for his marriage.

"Kim and I had been friends for a long time," he explains. "There was one story in particular, the 'Requiem' issue in #20—"

"Issue #21," Yale corrects him.

"She knows these stories better than I do!" he says. "Well, she sent me a long letter about it, with some very personal stuff which touched her deeply. I realized she needed to talk to me about it—so we went out and talked, and walked, and somewhere along the way, I realized that this one needed to be kissed. Suddenly, we realized that this was the right angle to the relationship."

"We ended up necking in a car down by Lake Michigan," she laughs. "Fortunately, the Evanston Park Patrol cars stopped following us a long time ago!"

Their relationship has developed a professional aspect, as well. Yale—who has written some *Munden's Bar* stories on her own — recently co-wrote *New America* with her husband, a mini-series set in the world of Eclipse's *Scout*.

"We set up some things in *New America* that Tim Truman specifically asked us to, and there are major changes within the *Scout* world, many involving Rosa Winter. It was interesting to find her voice as a woman separate from the military persona," says Yale.

The husband-and-wife team are planning to tackle *Manhunter* together, an ongoing series resulting from DC's *Millennium*.

"The Manhunter is Mark Shaw, previously the Privateer," Ostrander explains. "He has broken clear of the old Manhunter cult. He has a different mask and a whole new look designed by Doug Rice, who'll be the artist—we could've sold the series on the look of the costume alone! It incorporates elements of all the old Manhunters, including the Walt Simonson version—it's really an homage.

"Mark Shaw has taken the name Manhunter as a reminder of why he wanted to become a Manhunter in the first place, and to remember what it did to him. He has been a hero and a villain, he knows both sides. My working slogan was 'He hunts the world's most dangerous game—for a price.' He's a bounty hunter specializing in the costumed villain. In fact, *Manhunter* will probably be crossing in and out of *Suicide Squad* from time to time, and some of the people he captures will wind up on Suicide Squad missions. 'Manhunter, we need *this* particular kind of villain—can you find him and bring him in?' He's not terribly interested in confrontation, if he can avoid it. He would prefer to catch them with their masks down—unfortunately, it doesn't work out that way."

"The theme of masks has dictated the first storyline," Yale explains, "and it's a theme we'll carry through as the series goes on. What do masks mean? We *all* have masks."

Despite collaborating with his wife and Close, Ostrander's workload is formidable. "If I couldn't write on my computer, I wouldn't be able to turn out the amount or the quality," he says. "Computers allow me to go back and do changes and rewrites easily. Also, the more I write, the more I'm *able* to write. Like any skill, the more it's honed, the better it gets. I can't say all of my writing is up to the level that I would like. There may come a time when I drop back to make sure the overall quality is everything I'm capable of doing."

During his career so far, he has managed to handle a variety of titles, but says it's hard to say which others he wants to try.

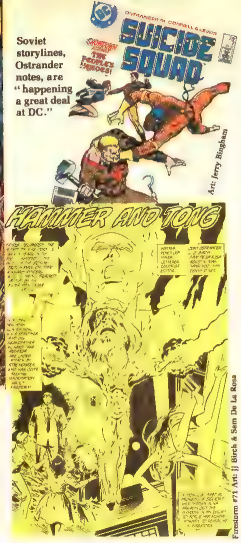
"I never really wanted a crack at *Firestorm*, but now I'm having a great time. There are characters who have been around a long time—I would like to take a shot at Superman or Batman, for whatever reasons, if only to see what I would do with those characters.

"It's like a great part for an actor. I know what everyone else has done with it, but what can I do with it? I can set my standards by that," he says.

"At times, I've wanted to work on the *Fantastic Four* or *Captain America*. Many things can be done with characters—no character is inherently bad, it's all in the treatment of them. Peter David just made the Hulk interesting, and I would not have bet *money* that it was possible! There are certain characters I wouldn't want to try right now, like Wonder Woman or Jonny Quest, because the people on them now are doing such a good job. I enjoy them too much to want to do it differently!"

And if all this weren't enough, Ostrander and Yale are planning yet *another* series for later this year, to be started and plotted by Ostrander, with Kim Yale eventually taking over most of the writing. Approval of the series could lead to the inevitable.

"Eventually this year, I'll probably have to drop something," John Ostrander admits, but doesn't yet know what it will be. "Either that, or I'll have to get a *second* computer!" ■



Soviet storylines, Ostrander notes, are "happening a great deal at DC."

Ron and Mikhail find themselves in trouble, but Firestorm has problems of his own. Is the Nuclear Man really a part of them or is he something else altogether?

Steve Bissette has risen from the grave, ready to tackle timely terrors.

Breaking TABOO

By DANIEL DICKHOLTZ

Although he's no longer slogging through the swamps, Steve Bissette is still striking terror into the hearts of readers. This time, however, he and longtime partner John Totleben are doing it from the pages of their own horror anthology, *Taboo*. "The whole point of this book," Bissette admits, "is to *disturb* and *unsettle* the reader."

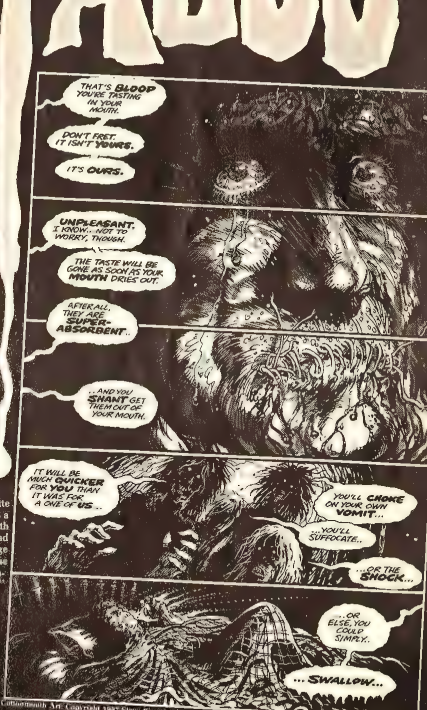
Consequently, those who dare pick up the 160-page trade paperback (available through specialty shops and mail order via FantaCo Enterprises) shouldn't expect to see the same old gallons of gore, gobs of guts or the typical twist ending. *Taboo*'s co-editors have no intention of robbing the graves of past genre anthologies.

"There is no reason why horror cannot thrive in the comic art form as much as it has in written fiction and film. It's just that everyone is so busy emulating the old EC stuff for whatever reasons—whether it's because they are nostalgic about it or it's just crass commercial reliance on that formula," Bissette notes. "They go back to those tried-and-true gruesome things which were very subversive in the early '50s when they were *only* being done in comics. Now we are of a generation where who cares how gruesome the drawing is? It's not going to have the impact that it has on the screen. Why compete with, or emulate, that?

"We tried to put together a book that was interesting for us to read as adults rather than just another pastiche," he explains, one with "stories that may occasionally be gruesome, but it's the ideas and the concepts that stay and really nag at you. There's a new voice in here, and that's what we're looking for in *Taboo*: What is it *uniquely* about comics that they can do a horror story in such a way that it's very different, but just as effective as an excellent horror short story or novel or film?"

That was a question Bissette and Totleben—fast friends since they discovered their common interest in the macabre during their Joe Kubert School days—first raised when they began messing around with a certain marsh monster.

"When John and I were doing *Swamp Thing*, an interesting thing happened. The existing horror comics, DC's


THAT'S BLOOD YOU'RE TASTING IN YOUR MOUTH.
DON'T FRET. IT ISN'T YOURS.
IT'S OURS.
UNPLEASANT, I KNOW... NOT TO WORRY, THOUGH.
THE TASTE WILL BE GONE AS SOON AS YOUR MOUTH DRIES OUT.
AFTER ALL, THEY ARE SUPER-ABSORBENT.
...AND YOU SHANT GET THEM OUT OF YOUR MOUTH.
IT WILL BE MUCH QUICKER FOR YOU THAN IT WAS FOR A ONE OF US.
YOU'LL CHOKE ON YOUR OWN VOMIT...
YOU'LL SUFFOCATE...
...OR THE SHOCK...
...OR ELSE, YOU COULD SIMPLY...
...SWALLOW...

Steve Bissette weaves a tale of both undead revenge and a case of "Cotton-mouth."

Cottonmouth Art Copyright 1987 Steve Bissette

HUHH
HAAAA HUHHHH... HAAAA HUHHHH...
JEEZUS WHAT...!
GOT THE BAG OFF YOR HEAD, YOR DUMMIES!
HAA HUHH... HAA HUH...
OH MY GOD! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?
STOP IT! TAKE IT OFF! OFF HER!
HAHuhhh... HAHuuuhh... HAH huhhh...
HAAAHH... AHAHAH... STOP IT!!
CLICK
"I CREAT THE FEST OF THE PHONING THE TV CON PRIZES AND COMPLAIN IT WASN'T FUNNY! "I HAD A PRETTY SICK JOKE, I KNOWE
"THEY ALL DRUED! AN KNOWLEDGE OF THE SHOW.
"YOU, TOO, HUH?

Caine on Manor Art Copyright 1987 Bill Wray & Alan Moore

Alan Moore and Bill Wray invite contestants to "Come On Down" and try to win prizes that can't be found on other game shows.

House of Mystery and all that stuff, folded. For about a two-month period, *Swamp Thing* was the only horror title on the stands," Bissette recalls. "Then, Bruce Jones started *Tales of Terror*, and we read that with interest and were disappointed that he chose to just rehash E.C. stuff, especially since he had proven that he was capable of much better work.

"I mention that because in the meantime, our editor hired Alan Moore as the new writer on *Swamp Thing*, and I can't describe to you the chemistry that happened. It was the most exciting time I have ever had as a cartoonist. We found all these possibilities for doing horror material in comics that we hadn't seen done before.

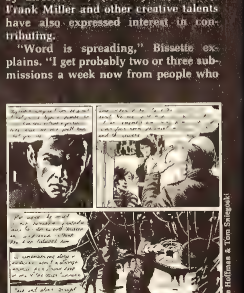
"At the same time," he relates, "we were somewhat straitjacketed. We lost the Comics Code seal on one of our issues, and DC backed us. We didn't use that as license to go over the top as we might have, but it was exciting that we had the company's blessing. However, we were *still* straitjacketed by the fact that our book had to dovetail with that universe of Batman, Superman, Justice League and all that nonsense. John and I knew we were scratching the surface with what we were doing with *Swamp Thing*, and that's where the idea came out of, just the desire to do a horror book the way we felt it *should* be done."

Thanks to a chance meeting at 1985's Mid-Ohio Convention, that idea became a reality. A great admirer of their work, and fresh from the success of his self-published *High Society*, Dave Sim made Bissette and Totleben an offer they could hardly refuse. In what Bissette calls "the best deal in comics," Sim would publish *any* project the pair wanted to produce and keep only 25 percent of the profits, the rest being divided among the co-editors and the remaining creators. Additionally, Sim set up a fund out of *High Society*'s profits so that contributors could be paid as their work came in.

"I honestly don't believe anyone else would do this," says Bissette. "When we first began talking about it, we mentioned to a couple of our editors at DC what we were doing, and [editor-in-chief] Dick Giordano at one point said, 'Why don't you let us print it?' And, not to be rude, we laughed. They would never put their company name on something with the stories we have. If it weren't for Dave Sim, I don't think *Taboo* would exist, or we would be trying to do it on our own, which would be even more time-consuming and exhausting. Dave really made it possible."

Joining Bissette and Totleben on their latest journey into fear is an eclectic group of creators, ranging from mainstream notables like Alan Moore, Charles Vess and Keith Giffen to such outsiders as S. Clay Wilson and Charles Burns. Horror author Clive Barker provides an introduction, and thanks to him, his fellow writer Michael McDowell has penned a story for the second volume which will be illustrated by director Tim (*Beetle Juice*) Burton. Frank Miller and other creative talents have also expressed interest in contributing.

"Word is spreading," Bissette explains. "I get probably two or three submissions a week now from people who



Tooth Decay Art Copyright 1987 Mike Hoffman & Tom Sniegoski

A father's discovery in the sewers gives his son a deadly case of "Tooth Decay" in a story by Mike Hoffman & Tom Sniegoski.

CRASH!
WAAA!
STUPID BUNNY... STUPID BUNNY!!! I HATE HIM! I HATE HIM!
NO SENSE OF HUMOUR!
WHY DOES HE HAVE TO BE MY BEST FRIEND?
IT'S OVER
UNLESS I CAN SPEAK TO COOT'S MOTHER
Bunny Art: Copyright 1986 Chester Brown

Chester Brown's funny animal work will appear in the first two volumes of *Taboo* "because it made us laugh but at the same time it *haunted* us," Bissette explains. "This guy is doing unsettling stuff."

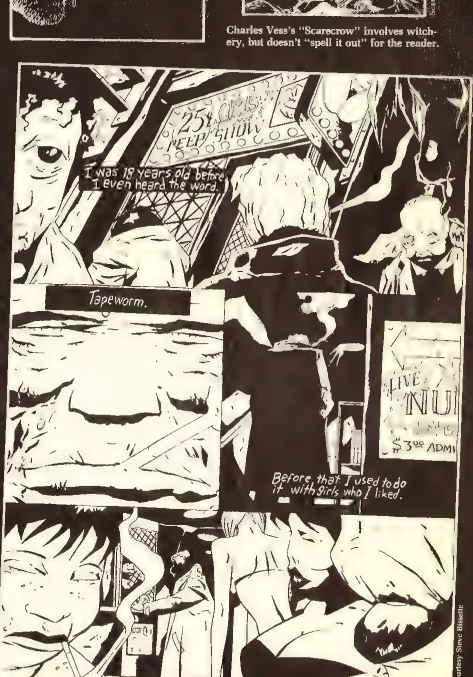
have either heard through the grapevine what we're doing or people who have done work for us, were pleased with how it worked out and told their associates. There seems to be this undercurrent that *Taboo* is a party, and the people who have a bent toward doing this kind of material want to be invited. That's just the atmosphere we would like to have the book come out of because then everyone does it for love, rather than just for money."

However, the squeamish or faint of heart should be warned before they put on their hats and break out their noisemakers. "We are not going to be putting any 'Adults Only' or any label like that on the cover," Bissette notes. "John's and my own beliefs about ratings systems in film or in comics is that it's censorship of a form. We're printing up some stickers and putting together a display for retailers who want to label it as 'Adults Only' just to protect themselves, but we are not going to pay any sort of lip service to that with the book itself.

"I'm confident that *Taboo* will do well," says Steve Bissette. "I don't think we'll be multimillionaires, but I hope we can reach the readership of which John Totleben and I are a part. We like horror movies, we like horror fiction, and we're hoping that there's a readership hungry for a *good* horror comic." ■

Keith Giffen and Robert Loren Fleming's "Chigger and the Man' was just such a potent, disturbing and unnerving story that we (Bissette and Totleben) knew it *had* to be in *Taboo*.

Charles Vess's "Scarecrow" involves witchery, but doesn't "spell it out" for the reader.


25¢ HELP! SHOW
I was 18 years old before I even heard the word.
Tapeworm.
LIVE NU
$3.00 ADMI
Before, that I used to do it with girls who I liked.
Now I know better.
Chigger & Man Art: Copyright 1987 Keith Giffen & Robert Loren Fleming
All Taboo Art Courtesy Steve Bissette

Daffy

(continued from page 37)

Obviously, if you are Robert Givens or Richard Thomas or Frank Thomas or Ollie Johnston, you've grown up doing it and you have a sense of where the form is and where it is going.

"For example, Chuck Jones, who liked 'The Duxorcist' quite a bit, questioned the conservative design of the backgrounds. That was a conscious choice on our part because we were trying to hit on people's associations with the classic cartoons. That doesn't mean we will always do that, but in this particular instance, we wanted to strike a familiar chord. Of course, Jones' perspective is quite understandable. He wants to *keep* developing; he wants animation to grow and not to live in the past. Jones approaches animation in the present tense, rather than using the past and mixing it with the present to create a new piece. In other words, he doesn't have the same historical approach that we obviously came in with."

Ford suggests that the next Warners cartoon to be released, "Night of the Living Duck," will be animation more firmly in the "present tense."

"It's very different," he reveals. "It goes much more into the weird, abstract area of cartoons, which I like to work with. 'Night of the Living Duck' is basically a song cartoon; if you wish, think of 'The Duxorcist' as a Looney Tune and 'Night of the Living Duck' as a Merrie Melodie. The more traditional approach of 'The Duxorcist' was a safer way to start. If Chuck Jones' first film had been 'Duck Amuck' (1953), or Bob Clampett's first had been 'Book Revue' (1946), they would have been fired on the spot.

"Animation fans will be more attracted to 'Night'—it really is very strange, with brilliant animation by Mark Kausler, who is also a former animation critic and a prolific animator; but I think general audiences will respond more to Daffy in 'The Duxorcist.'"

Ford admits that the spectre of the legendary Warners past looms over them. "We are trying to make good, genre cartoons; we are not trying to make the most colossal Looney Tunes ever made. We wanted to keep it fun and not be so self-conscious about what we were doing or worry over each little moment. We wanted to think that we were back in the 1950s and just making cartoons. Maybe Walter Lantz was doing a Woody-exorcist cartoon and across town, a Popeye-exorcist parody was coming out—that was our basic psychology."

Working both sides of the desk—as critic and filmmaker—has increased Greg Ford's appreciation for the men who made cartoons into a legendary art. "I think Chuck Jones made more great cartoons than *anyone* alive. I, and many others, wouldn't be working in cartoons if he hadn't existed." ■

Photos: CBS

Jones

(continued from page 12)

quotation that you can never step twice into the same stream.

"We never do a thing exactly the same twice," he adds philosophically. "One of the wonderful things to me about watching children's behaviors is how inaccurate they are. When a child runs around a post, he either clears it by 10 feet or runs into it."

Aside from his consulting work on *Roger Rabbit* as well as commercials (among them an award-winning series of beer ads in England), Jones has put down his pencil and picked up a brush. His paintings of the Warner Bros. characters have been commanding between $3,500-4,000 a piece, "and they've been *selling*," he adds, a bit surprised.

He's also working on re-creating limited editions of the original animation cels that, their value unknown at the time, were burned by Warner Bros. (These prints are available at selected art galleries—including NYC's T.R.'s Gallery. For further information, contact Linda Jones Enterprises, 789 W. 20th Street, Costa Mesa, CA 92627.)

Another stop, this spring, will be England, where he'll lecture at the BBC and British Film Institute.

All in all, Jones remains as active as his most renowned character, hopping from one stop to the next. He's happy to have a chance to discuss the Warner Bros. tradition now that most of his compatriots are gone.

It represents an era that, perhaps belatedly, has earned its own place in animation history. Proof may be that videocassette compilations of the cartoons have gone gold in terms of sales, Jones' being among the leaders. While he doesn't receive any royalties for those sales and rentals, Chuck Jones nonetheless takes pride that the work is still seen and savored. And, with his usual apomb, he downplays the gold sales plateau. "If it did," he says modestly, "it's because I've got a big family. After all, there are a lot of Joneses." ■

Pulps

(continued from page 46)

"They're alpha and omega," he observes. "They're very, very different. It's like, in one of my previous associations with this company, writing Green Lantern and Batman. One is a science-fantasy character and the other rooted in the darker side of the superhero mythos. Doc Savage and The Shadow are two separate strains of the pulp tradition. They're yin and yang. If you wanted to make one of those arbitrary divisions between characters, you could do it between the hi-tech characters who tend to be optimistic and sunny, and the 'creature of the night' characters who are pessimistic and moody. They're both interesting projects. They each make their own demands."

Comparisons between O'Neil's version of The Shadow and the modern, almost Europunk version currently being written for DC by Andrew Helfer are inevitable. But O'Neil is reluctant to draw any of his own.

"I tried to stay very faithful in spirit to the original," he says. "But I was doing a period piece and I had the luxury of staying faithful. I played The Shadow as an impersonal force. That's the way I got around his not paying attention to due process. I never gave him a thought balloon. The humanity came from other characters. The Shadow was distant, impersonal, a force of nature."

Interestingly, O'Neil is experimenting with his Doc Savage in the same way. No thought balloons. But he definitely doesn't plan to write an impersonal Doc Savage.

"One of the things that might be developed in the comic is that Doc was the best man alive in 1945, but he was very much a man of his time. He would have many attitudes and assumptions that *everybody* had in 1945 regarding women and race and so on that are *not* true in 1988, but would be painful for him to learn. So Doc Savage, if he were, in effect, Rip Van Winkle for 30 years, would have many of those kinds of problems."

His *Doc Savage* is a bit removed from the wildly humorous, often self-deprecatingly whimsical pulp novels of Lester Dent, and O'Neil recognizes this difference.

"I certainly don't object to humor. My humor tends to be on the dark side. I like that feeling of high adventure romp, but we have to be careful with regards to our market, which doesn't always accept that kind of thing. For example, *Indiana Jones* bombed as a comic book. Couldn't give it away. It wasn't that it was that badly done. It was just that the audience wasn't going to accept it. Anything that verges on self-parody is anathema to the audience. That's one of the few things about this business that *hasn't* changed in 22 years," he concludes wryly. ■

30 Years in the 30th Century

Writer Paul Levitz details his years with the "Legion of Super-Heroes," and reveals the latest plans for celebrating three decades of futuristic superhero adventures.

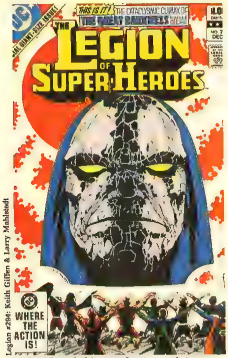
By PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL

There is no significance to the coincidence of Superman's 50th anniversary and the Legion's 30th coming in the same year," says Paul Levitz, who has been scripting the superteam of the future's adventures for some seven years now. "Some of the DC changes of the late 1950s were the result of great plans, but there was a mass of stuff that just happened. I don't think anybody who worked on that first Legion story had anything special in mind except to do a cute Superboy story to fill 12 or 13 pages in that month's *Adventure*."

That "cute Superboy story," written by SF author Otto Binder and drawn by Al Plastino, has become one of the most enduring parts of the Superman legend, although it has recently been jettisoned from the Man of Steel's continuity. The Legion of Super-Heroes has grown from its original three members—Lightning Lad, Saturn Girl and Cosmic Boy—to encompass a membership of 25, along with hangers-on and associates in a well-thought-out world of Earth's 30th century. The fandom which coalesced around the Legion was one of the earliest organized

Paul Levitz, with his pet of famous artists' pencil and pen-and-ink portraits in pastels. Others adorn his office hallway. Shh.

Legion cast: Art: Ken Steacy



Legion #294: Keith Giffen & Larry Mahlstedt

Darkseid made his grand entrance into Legion continuity during "The Great Darkness Saga."

parts of comics readership. In fact, in the days when editors were as likely to ignore reader mail as not, then-Legion editor Mort Weisinger began to let the readers dictate continuity, by having them elect the Legion's leader.

Paul Levitz admits to being one of those early fans. "I was eight years old, maybe, and I ran across a few of the Legion stories in *Adventure*," he recalls. "I had a subscription to *Action*, and I enjoyed it. But I kept seeing ads for the Legion. I knew a little bit about it, and when the renewal came up, I had my folks switch my subscription to *Adventure*.

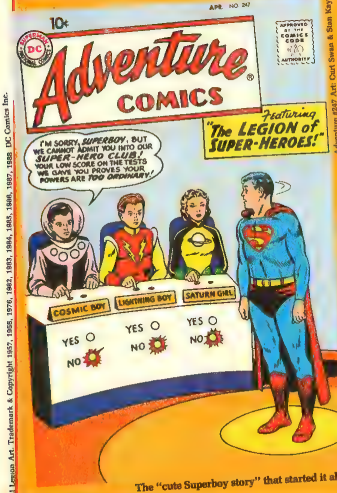
"I was entranced! I came in right at the end of Edmond Hamilton's run on the series, which was a very exciting period, and right at the beginning of Jim Shooter's stuff, which was terrific, arguably as good as anything that DC was publishing and right up there with some of the better Marvel stuff of the period. I got very involved with it. It was the first thing I actively collected."

Levitz's fan activities grew to the point where he was editing and publishing fanzines in his early teens, including *The Comic Reader*, a sort-of *TV Guide* for the comics business and, "the only fanzine I published that I would not consider suitable for blackmail," he comments. "It was unusual for its time for both the regularity of its publishing schedule and the size of its circulation, a 3,000-copy circulation, which was a tremendous proportion of all comics fans in the days before comics shops, when you had to subscribe to a fanzine to get it."

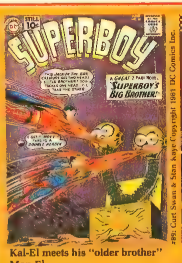
Through *The Comic Reader* and other fan activities, Levitz got to know the people at DC Comics, and eventually went to work at the company. "In 1972, I went on staff as a part-time assistant editor, filling in for Mike Fleisher, when he went on vacation for a summer. He never came back, and I never quite left," Levitz laughs. He worked part time through school, eventually settling on DC's business side. He is now the executive vice-president, in charge of operations for DC Comics, Inc.

The young executive's first professional connection with the Legion of Super-Heroes began with a brief writing stint in 1976. "I was on the title for about two years. It was a very patchy run. I was at a stage in my career that I think most freelance writers go through, of living through the fan dream of thinking, 'Oh, I

Highlights of Legion History



The "cute Superboy story" that started it all.



Kal-El meets his "older brother" Mon-El.

The Fatal Five culminates their debut with Ferro Lad's curtain call.

Legion #301 updated the heroes' first triumph in *Adventure* #300.

All Legion Art, Trademark & Copyright 1957, 1958, 1979, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 DC Comics Inc.
Adventure #247: Curt Swan & Stan Kaye
#291: Curt Swan & Stan Kaye/Copyright 1981 DC Comics Inc.
#300: Curt Swan & George Klein/Copyright 1982 DC Comics Inc.
#333: Curt Swan & George Klein/Copyright 1987 DC Comics Inc.
Legion #287: Keith Giffen & Larry Mahlstedt

can do that!' So, every time an assignment is floating through the hall that makes any sense, you grab it. The net result was that there were an incredible number of fill-in stories on the *Legion* during that period," he confesses. "We also had a number of artist performance problems—wonderful quality work, but nobody who could really do it on a monthly basis. The net result was that no three issues in a row were done by the same group of people during my first tenure. I very much wanted to write *Legion*, but I did such a choppy job of it that ultimately I left the assignment.

"I came back to it about 1979 or early 1980. Mike Barr, who was editing the book then, had inherited it with Roy Thomas taking over as writer. But Roy had a conflicting assignment and had to give it up," he adds. "Mike convinced me to take it back, and this stretch has worked out much better, thankfully." The combined total of nine years writing *Legion* means Levitz has been its regular scripter for nearly a third of the feature's history.

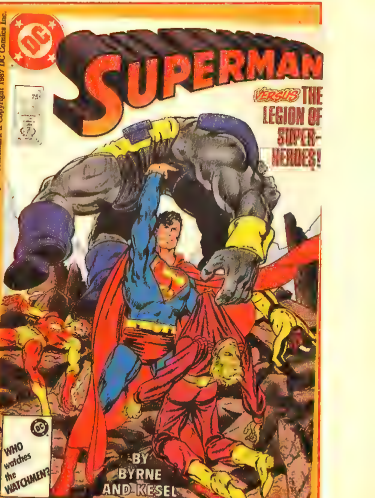
Obviously, DC couldn't allow the 30th anniversary of such a fan-favorite title to go uncelebrated. Already on sale are *Who's Who in the Legion*, a seven-issue

Despite her previous role in Legion history, Levitz found Dream Girl to be "utterly boring," until recently.

Even with the large roster of the Legion, Levitz is still able to shine the spotlight on individual members. Here, Timber Wolf carries out Karate Kid's last wish.

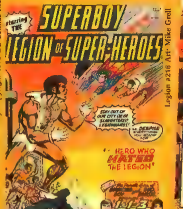
Revealing their future, Jim Shooter created a new adult universe for the Legion.

Bouncing Boy and Duo Damsel are the first Legionnaires to be married.



It takes the Man of Steel and the Legion's fantastic four to straighten out the glitches in post-*Crisis* history, where there is no Superboy.

Timber Wolf returned with a new face by Dave Cockrum to help the Legion take over Superboy's title.



By popular demand, the Legion gains its first black member, Tyroc.

Cosmic Boy #1: Steve Lightle/Trademark & Copyright 1986 DC Comics Inc.

The Cosmic Boy mini-series started tackling some of the anomalies made in Legion history thanks to *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

mini-series that provides extensive background on the characters; an origin of the Legion in *Secret Origins* by Levitz and artist Rick Stacy; and, finally, the Legion's 30th anniversary issue itself, #45, in a double-sized format, with guest art by such former Legion personnel as Mike Grell, Keith Giffen, Curt Swan and Dave Cockrum. Another part of the celebration will appear this spring: The *Wanderers* spin-off series written by Doug Moench.

It is a rare feature that survives for five years, let alone 30, in the volatile comic-book market. Levitz believes there are several factors that contribute to its longevity. "Certainly, long before all the teenage books that are in vogue today existed, the Legion was the first kid superhero group," he explains. "I think that was a very powerful part of its appeal originally. The science-fiction aspect, which differentiates it from pretty much everything else in comics—it's the *only* real mix of science fiction and superheroes—has been a very important fact. And the sheer number of characters, all of whom are relatively equal, is important.

"If you're eight years old and playing Justice League of America, everybody wants to be Superman, and there's no great rush to be the Atom," Levitz notes. "It is really only the Legion where everybody could have their own favorite character or characters that weren't any worse than anybody else's. The odds of two guys bumping up against each other, wanting to do the same thing, were pretty small. You could almost feel a private attachment to the Legion. I constantly have people tell me that this or that character was their favorite when they were a kid. Frequently, it is a character who, when he goes back and looks, the reader says, 'I really can't figure out why. There's no discernible reason. Maybe I liked his emblem.' "

This is not to say that the Legion hasn't kept up with the times, as Levitz is quick to point out. "I guess the biggest changes in *Legion* in the past 30 years are those that reflect the changes in comics. Comics had a tremendous charm and naivete in the 1950s. They were intended for young children, so nobody had any problems, and the stories were all gimmick-oriented. I loved them. You could kill people off and bring them back in the middle of a story because it was all hocus-pocus, just storytelling. Now, comics are much more melodramatic, they are laden with emotional problems for the characters and interrelationships between the characters. The Legion has changed to reflect all that."

Given the difficulties of writing as complicated a series as the Legion, what drove Levitz to want it as an assignment, not once, but twice? "The first attraction as a writer was the chance to write something within the DC universe. When you write most group titles, you are forced to *match* other people's stuff. If you write *Justice League*, and write it wonderfully, many of the personalities you write must be those the characters have in their own books. *Legion* is off in a corner, and you can do what you want. Although Jim Shooter did some pioneering work in creating characters, many of the 20-odd members were still basically cardboard figures. There was no background, no personality. That gave me tremendous freedom as a writer to look at their backgrounds and say, 'All right, what do we know about this person? Who would they be? How would they behave?' *That* was an exciting challenge."

Karate Kid #1: Mike Grell/™ & Copyright 1976 DC Comics Inc.

Levitz made Karate Kid the first Legionnaire to make it into his own regular series—only to kill the character off in *Legion*.

Sub-Heroes #1: Keith Giffen & Karl Kesel/Trademark & Copyright 1986 DC Comics Inc.

A non sequitur in the Legion annals is the Legion of Substitute Heroes far-out solo adventure.

Mention of Jim Shooter (who began scripting the Legion feature when he was 13 years old) brings to mind all the top talents who have worked on the series in the past, including science-fiction writer Edmond Hamilton and Superman co-creator Jerry Siegel. Although most would find it dif-

Almost a decade later, Lightning Lad, Saturn Girl and Cosmic Boy would follow Karate Kid solo with a mini-series of their own.

Legionnaires Three #1: Ernie Colon & Karl Kesel/Trademarks & Copyright 1985 DC Comics Inc.

ficult to follow such well-known figures, Levitz says, "It's daunting to the same extent that any of us who grew up as fans find working in the business daunting. There's something very strange in those first months when you've crossed to the other side of the desk from enjoying the medium, admiring the people who do it, to sitting there and saying, 'OK, it's my turn. Now, what do I do?' Those first few minutes are very scary.

"It's also very daunting when you do work that you don't think lives up to the standards of your predecessors. I think, over the time I've been on *Legion*, I've managed to do a fair handful of stories that will stand up with the best of anything my predecessors have done, always judged by what's right for the time in which the story is done. It's not fair to put one of my stories against one of Hamilton's. We were trying to do entirely different things, and our editors and our marketplaces had different requirements," he comments. "There are many things that I think the early writers succeeded in—the crystalline clarity and simplicity of their stories, for example—that are almost impossible to do in comics today. To do that, they had to sacrifice a wealth of background and detail that they might have enjoyed doing, but was inappropriate for their time. On the other hand, by building that into modern Legion stories, you make it a more complex and less accessible kind of writing."

That intricate background and inacessibility to new readers bothers Levitz. "Any title for which you can write and market sourcebooks, that involves the assumption of a different time (and frequently a different world), that involves a running cast of 30 or 40 characters, is hard for readers to get into," he admits. "That's a general problem that many comics have today, but it has always been a bit of a problem for *Legion*. On the other hand, the Legion seems to command a loyalty from its fans unmatched by anything I've seen in this business. I'm constantly getting letters from people who have been following the book for 10 or 20 years, and are clearly still totally involved with it. There's an amazing power it has over its readership."

Any writer who was once a fan of the material he is now working on himself must have favorites among the characters. However, Levitz maintains that those favorites change with the necessities of storytelling. "For example, I never liked Dream Girl," he confesses. "I never thought she was an interesting or useful character. I never understood what she was doing there. But, the readers voted her the Legion leader in our traditional election. Actually, someone sent in a petition with a tremendous number of names on it voting for Dream Girl—we've since changed the rules to disallow petitions—but I was stuck with this character I thought was utterly boring as the leader. I thought about who she was, her background, what she had done in the past, and she turned into a character I've enjoyed very much ever since. Those characters I've really had a chance to do something with are my favorites. Element Lad is another one I've done a tremendous amount with over the last few years. It's a kick writing some of the newer ones who have their own little bizarre patterns, like Tellus or Blok. At the same time, I enjoy the old stand-bys, Brainiac 5, Saturn Girl, the ones I inherited complete with an established personality.

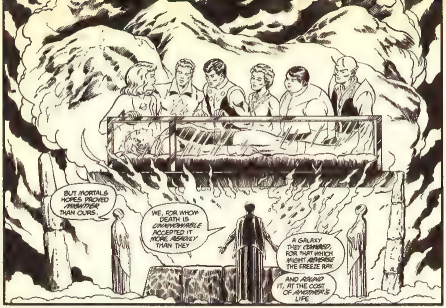
"Who is most neglected varies from time to time," Levitz remarks. "The last time we went over our list, we saw we were overdue to do something with Phantom Girl, Ultra Boy and the new Invisible Kid. They're high on our list for storylines, we've been ignoring them for too long. But that always changes. When

Art: Greg LaRocque & Mike DeCarlo

Lightning Lad's sinister sibling, Lightning Lord, escapes in a Greg LaRocque-Mike DeCarlo-drawn sequence from the 30th anniversary issue.

Wanderers Art: Dave Hoover & Robert Campanella

After years of playing second fiddle to the Legion, the Wanderers finally get their own series.


BUT MORTAL'S HOPES PROVED MORE FRAGILE THAN OURS
WE, FOR WHOM DEATH IS COMPREHENSIBLE, ACCEPTED IT MORE READILY THAN THEY
A GALAXY THEY CHERISHED FOR THAT WHICH MIGHT ARRIVE BEYOND THE FREEZE RAY
AND ABOVE IT, AT THE COST OF ANONYMITY'S LIFE

Art: Curt Swan & Mike DeCarlo

Curt Swan and Mike DeCarlo help Paul Levitz recall one of the most tragic moments in Legion history.

Levitz Photo: John Clayton

For Paul Levitz, writing the *Legion* is a fan's dream fulfilled.

we started the cycle that had Karate Kid killed and led to Sensor Girl's appearance, Karate Kid and Princess Projectra were two of the most neglected Legionnaires. Now, it's very easy to consider Sensor Girl one of the over-used."

The events surrounding DC's radical altering of its continuity resulted in a considerable reworking of the Legion's history, including explaining how Superboy could have been a member when there never *was* a Superboy. Levitz says he dealt with those alterations as best he could.

"The complicated changes in the Legion's world required by post-Crisis events had not diminished story possibilities. It's always difficult when you have to deal with a company-wide set of changes. Dick Giordano, John Byrne, Karen Berger, Andy Helfer, Mike Carlin and I all got together and thrashed something out that we all believed could work," he explains. "It seems to have worked fairly well. There was a lot of positive as well as negative reader reaction to the stories that linked the Legion to the new continuity. The negative reaction was natural. Any time you have changes, there are people who want to preserve what has been before.

"But many readers thought it was a good solution to the problems, and there was a general realization that the problems existed for the right reasons. Continuity *does* change over time; you have to change the characters you're working with. I'm pleased that, on *Legion*, we've been able to make that an evolutionary adaptation. We've never gotten so screwed up that we had to trash everything and go back to the beginning."

Levitz says he is limiting his writing to *Legion* for the foreseeable future. "Writing is a sideline to my staff work," he explains. "I may give up *Legion* at some time—I have a seven-year run on it now, which is about as long as anybody has lasted in modern comics. I may run out of steam at some point. I've probably written as many issues now as I read before I was a professional. The run I've done on the book is certainly an adequate repayment for the fun I got out of the Legion of Super-Heroes as a kid." ■

Mike Grell and Dick Giordano re-create their Lightning Lad-Saturn Girl wedding pictures for the Legion's 30th anniversary celebration.

ONCE, MORE WE SHALL SEE, AND PERHAPS LEARN IN THE BROKE WHAT WE COULD NOT IN THE CLASH.
THOSE WHO MARRY BECOMING THAN FIRST IS NOT HAPPINESS OVER THE ANGER?
THOSE IS AWESOME SPELL, BUT SPARE ME, I SEE N.C. VOWED IN SOLEMNITY WHEN THEY WERE ALL BUT ONE. IN EVERYTHING SO-FAR-FARTH.

Art: Mike Grell & Dick Giordano

Spider-Man

(continued from page 32)

worked the lowest rate a couple of days a week, she would make 200 grand a year! That takes away a lot of what Peter Parker was, scrambling for nickels and dimes to make ends meet.

"The only way to get away from that is to have someone slash Mary Jane's face. That sounded a bit extreme, so I've been trying to live with a realistic view of what has been set up," Michelinie relates. "So, basically, there is a monetary conflict. Peter is married to a wife who is making a great deal of money. He is moving into this condo, he doesn't want to be a kept person and he needs to find a new direction for his life. Some of that is dealt with in #300 and sets up a future direction for the book."

In fact, over the next three issues, Michelinie reveals, "Peter is actually offered a job as an assistant director of research at an experimental scientific company, and he finds that it is *exactly* what he wants." Unfortunately, it would mean moving to Kansas. While the webbed wonder wrestles with that problem, he must also deal with both the Silver Sable and the Sandman.

Afterwards, Peter Parker confronts a situation he never dealt with in his civilian identity before: being a celebrity. In a story that weaves in and out of all three titles during the summer, he will be hitting the road, publicizing a coffee-table-sized collection of all his photographs of Spider-Man in action. Conveniently, the promotional tour will take him to every city in the country that is also hosting a major comic convention.

"There will be a sequence of events. If you're following all the books, if you pick up *Web*, he's leaving Detroit, and the next one, he's in the next city," Salicrup explains. Unlike last year's title crossovers, "you won't have to get them all. If you do, then you'll enjoy it that much more. If not, they're accessible without any problems."

Meanwhile, Gerry Conway and Sal Buscema are planning on plaguing *Bugle* editor Robbie Robertson with a deadly new villain named Tombstone in *Spectacular*, and Peter David, Alex Saviuk and Keith Williams will have Betty Brant try to solve all her problems by joining a religious cult in an upcoming three-part tale in *Web*. Additionally, J.M. DeMatteis is working on a sequel to the recent Kraven storyline that would appear in Marvel's bookshelf format. In the DeMatteis project, says Salicrup, "Spider-Man becomes responsible for saving Kraven's soul, which is sort of in Limbo.

"Also, *Amazing* will be going *bi-weekly* during the summer. It will be 15 issues of *Amazing* for 1988 *plus* the other two titles *plus* each title will have an annual and all of Marvel's annuals will have more pages than ever before. So," observes Jim Salicrup, "there's going to be plenty of Spider-Man."

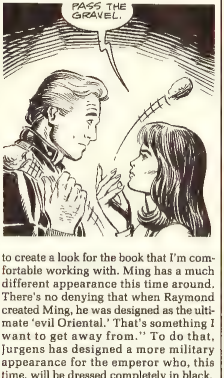
Flash Gordon

(continued from page 15)

the Hawkmen, the Sharkmen and all the other strange societies of Mongo to have a realistic relationship with their evil emperor. "The relationship of the outside societies to Ming is like that of the semi-autonomous puppet-states that existed under the Roman Empire. In addition, I have made Ming and his society much more decadent than they seemed in Raymond's stories. It is not necessarily a decadence that Ming recognizes as being wrong, it's just the way he is."

Jurgens says some of that decadence will come out in one of the holdovers from Raymond's original tale. "There were many sexual overtones to the original: Ming wanted Dale and his daughter wanted Flash. It seemed as though every two or three weeks one or more of the women was in chains. There will still be sexual overtones, but in a *different* way."

Admitting that there is hardly an artist in comics today who can hold a candle to Alex Raymond, Jurgens says, "I have tried



to create a look for the book that I'm comfortable working with. Ming has a much different appearance this time around. There's no denying that when Raymond created Ming, he was designed as the ultimate 'evil Oriental.' That's something I want to get away from." To do that, Jurgens has designed a more military appearance for the emperor who, this time, will be dressed completely in black.

The other characters won't be so changed. "The costumes that the heroes wore in Raymond's strip had a romantic feel to them, and we're staying with that," Jurgens explains. "Flash wears a swash-buckling sort of outfit, with a cloak. The costumes are skintight—not Batman-tight, where you can see the muscles rippling, but more like what Wally Wood used to draw, with wrinkles at the joints.

"All in all," Dan Jurgens says, considering the entire limited series, "we will be faithful to the spirit of *Flash Gordon*, but still bring it into the 1980s." ■

Shadow Line

(continued from page 19)

he has a hard time channeling this energy. He is thus at great risk in accepting the position."

Maintaining a visual link among the three Epic Shadow Line series is a unique cover plan. "Each month, all the covers will be painted by the same artist," Clark explains. "For the first of each title, it's Sienkiewicz; the second issues will be by Jay Muth; the third, by Kevin Nowlan; after that, we have Mark Churchillo, Kent Williams, George Pratt and Kevin O'Neill."

Given the tight world created by Archie Goodwin for the three series, how closely will the titles intertwine? Not as closely as one might expect. "The interrelation between the books is very specific," Chichester says. "If we set something up in one book, it will pay off in another book. But you don't have to read all three to enjoy any one of them. If you read just St. *George*, you're going to have a good time. But if you read all three books, you'll get a much richer sense of what happens in the whole world."

"You won't miss anything vital as a reader if you don't read all of them. It's just not fair to intertwine them too much," Clark notes.

On the other hand, Chichester points out, "If you are going to read all three, it's best to read them in the order of *Doctor Zero*, *Power Line*, *St. George* . . ."

"Especially since that's the order they ship in, and the order we write them in," adds Clark.

"There *will* be a sense of getting a full story for your money," Chichester promises. "A big part of that is to make it possible for a reader to get into the series at *any* time. Latecomers will miss some of the texture and background, but they can pick up on that fairly quickly."

However, keeping the books separate doesn't rule out the characters ever meeting. "Down the line, there *will* be crossovers," Chichester notes. "Zero and St. George, definitely. But each character has a unique outlook on the world, so there won't be crossovers where Power Line teams up with St. George, because of their radically different outlooks."

"Power Line is out to grab headlines, to get publicity. St. George, on the other hand, is a lone knight errant who just wants to help people, so publicity is the last thing he wants," Clark explains. "But since their interests are basically the same, there's a possibility they would meet."

"If we do have crossovers, we'll structure them so there is a logical progression in the stories of the three books," Chichester notes. "We don't want it to be that 'Sales are flagging on *Power Line*, so let's put St. George in to boost its sales this month.'" ■

COMICS REPORTER

The Comics Screen

In some way or another, these heroes and heroines have been announced as bound for another medium: movie, TV, animation, even Broadway. The characters originated in one of the well-springs of heroic lore: comic books, comic strips, pulp magazines, radio or cartoons. The following list is by no means complete and will be continuously updated. *All* projects are live-action unless otherwise specified.

The Addams Family. Projected TV pilot.

The Adjuster. Comic character in development from Marvel & Columbia Pictures TV.

The Airtight Garage. Moebius' SF graphic novel. Animated full-length feature. Co-production between a Montreal-based animation firm Productions Pascal Blais & Starwatcher Graphics.

The American. Dark Horse Comics hero in development as film or TV series.

American Flagg! Movie. (see Chaykin article).

Andy Capp. Separate British & American TV pilots in works.

Annie. Movie sequel (see item). Sequel Broadway musical also in development.

Antman. New World developed a script.

Archie. Two-hour NBC-TV movie/series pilot, to air 1987-88. Also, *The New Archies*, animated series from DIC Enterprises & Saban Productions on NBC Saturdays.

Arzach. Moebius' fantasy hero in development as animated TV special. Co-production between Southern Star & Starwatcher Graphics.

Babar. The children's book characters star in *Babar: The Movie*, an animated project from Nelvana, for spring 1988 release.

The Batman. Movie, long in development at Warner Bros. Script by Sam Hamm. Director: Tim Burton. Producers: Michael Uslan & Ben Melnicker, Jon Peters & Peter Guber (see item).

Beetle Bailey. Movie.

Betty Boop. Movie. Pierre Spengler, producer. Richard Fleischer (whose father & uncle, Dave & Max Fleischer, created the character) may direct.

Blade. Movie based on *Tomb of Dracula* character in development at New World Pictures. Script by Lee Goldberg & William Rabkin. To be directed by Tom De Simone.

Blackhawk. Film. In development. (see Chaykin article.)

Blondie. Further half-hour CBS animated special planned.

Brenda Starr, Reporter. Movie starring Brooke Shields & Timothy Dalton, possible release by New World Pictures.

Captain America. Proposed Cannon Films version apparently dead. Broadway musical in development. Animated half-hour adventures in production.

Cathy. Further animated TV specials to appear on CBS.

Cerebus. Animation plans abandoned.

The Chameleon. New comics character. Joint production between Marvel Productions & Ohlmeyer Communications TV.

Conan the Barbarian. Two different *Conan III* script treatments were prepared. Sequel in limbo due to Arnold Schwarzenegger's projects & earlier Conan films' disappointing box-office returns.

Copperhead: The Legend of Mongrel. Longtime joint project between Marvel & Laurel Entertainment developed by Jim Shooter & director George Romero. Reportedly dead.

Crossfire. TV pilot. ABC.

Daredevil. TV/movie incarnation discussed.

DNAgents. Option lapsed on CBS-TV movie. Picked up by UA for feature.

Dennis the Menace. TV movie aired via syndication. Possible live-action series may follow. Animated series in syndication.

Dick Tracy. Movie. Long in development with various directors and writers at different studios, now at 20th Century Fox. Several different screenplays extant. Still an active project.

Doc Savage. Movie project reportedly in the works.

Dr. Mortalis. New Jack Kirby comics character created for Empire Entertainment movie.

Dr. Strange. Movie. Bob Gale is scripting.

Dominique Shade. New comics character in development for Marvel.

Donald Duck. Donald makes cameo appearances in animated syndicated TV series, *Duck Tales* (see article).

Elektra. Movie scripted by L.M. Kit Carson & Jim McBride. McBride may direct.

Elfquest. Movie project in limbo at this time.

Fantastic Four. Movie in development with Neue Constantin.

The Far Side. Movie version of the Gary Larson comic panel. To be directed by Alan Rudolph.

Many Orphan Returns

That little chatterbox, the one with auburn locks, is strolling toward theaters again. Who can it be? Why, Harold Gray's Little Orphan Annie!

Annie, a presence on the newspaper pages since 1924, has had a varied career in movies, merchandising and radio (with a long-running radio serial that began in 1931). Contemporary audiences may know the character best from the 1977 Thomas Meehan/Charles Strouse/Martin Charnin Broadway musical *Annie*. Director John Huston's movie musical version, starring Carol Burnett, Tim Curry, Bernadette Peters and Albert Finney (as Daddy Warbucks), followed in 1982.

Separate sequels are planned for both movie and musical. Director/lyricist Martin Charnin is still developing a stage musical *Annie II*, aimed for a Broadway run.

In the meantime, the movie *Annie II*—with an entirely different storyline—begins shooting in April in Budapest. This project has been through numerous different scripts and writers in search of a concept, all since the first film's opening. At one time, the sequel was to be a *non-musical* adventure flick (nicknamed *Raiders of the Lost Annie*); another version was known as *The Further Adventures of Little Orphan Annie*. Whatever the final title, this *Annie II* has its own quartet of screenwriters: Deborah & Dan Levine, Eugenie Ross-Leming and Brad Buckner.

Casting hasn't yet been finalized. Additionally, it would seem unlikely that a now six-years-older Aileen Quinn would reprise her role as young Annie. This $12 million follow-up is again a Rastar Films production, in association this time with NBC and Tri-Star Pictures (whose allied firm, Columbia Pictures, distributed *Annie*).

The sun will come up tomorrow while if all goes well, the movie comes out this Christmas.

—David McDonnell

Little Orphan Annie once again heads toward the movies.

Annie Character Copyright 1987 Tribune Media Services Inc.

Batman Movie Rolls in July!

Batman: The Movie, the long awaited big-budget version of comicdom's Caped Crusader, becomes a reality in July when principal photography begins in London.

"That's right, after eight years *Batman* is *finally* going to be made!" says director Tim (*Pee-wee's Big Adventure*) Burton. Burton, who began pre-production and storyboarding for *Batman* shortly after completion of his latest film, *Beetle Juice*, claims some slight revisions are being done on Sam Hamm's script but "that all systems are go."

Needed now are the actors to play Batman, Robin and arch-villain, the Joker. Warner Bros. is leaning toward unknowns to play the dynamic duo and a name to play the Joker. (Rumor has it Jack Nicholson has been approached.) A budget is still being hammered out, but Burton feels the picture will ultimately come in at "around $20 million or a little less."

What is certain is the storyline, which, according to Burton, will focus on the beginning of Batman's crime-fighting career (although one source claims there will be no origin sequence), a major conflict with the Joker and the introduction of the Boy Wonder.

"The movie will borrow a little bit from every facet of the Batman experience," explains Burton. "There will be elements of the comic-book character, some of the intensity of *The Dark Knight* and a bit of the humor of the television series.

"We're not going to turn this movie into a psychological poem," continues Burton. "The basic theme is along the lines of 'Here's a child who has a life-changing experience. Instead of getting therapy, he deals with it by fighting crime.'"

Burton offers that one of the major stumbling blocks to getting *Batman* off the ground was whether or not to have Robin in the movie.

"Sam and I had the toughest time with that. It would have been easier not to have Robin in the movie since it does focus on an early period in Batman's career [and Robin did not appear in the comics for quite a while]. Over the years, though, people have gotten used to the idea of there being a Batman *and* Robin. We want to make this movie for everybody so we decided to include him."

Tim Burton has a great deal of himself invested in seeing *Batman: The Movie* through to completion. An avid Batman fan since the '60s, Burton has an ongoing love affair with the Batman image. On the film front, Burton's participation has been an element of the Batman movie rumors since 1985, and at one point, a treatment proposal bearing his name was actually in circulation.

"This will be a true movie treatment of Batman," concludes Burton. "A treatment that will satisfy everybody."

At presstime, *Batman: The Movie* is slated for a 1989 release.

—*Marc Shapiro*

"After eight years, *Batman* is finally going to be made," announces Tim Burton, the film's director.

Batman: Art: Jerry Bingham/Trademark & Copyright 1987 DC Comics Inc.

Beyond "Fantastic Planet"

Light Year Art: Courtesy Miramax Films

Rene Laloux, noted for his animated opus *Fantastic Planet*, unveils a new vision in *Light Years*, a tale of civilizations dying and reborn. These (pictured) are the Deformed, bizarre outcasts who aid the hero in his epic quest. Laloux adapted the novel by Jean-Pierre Andrevon as the basis of this film, which was known as *Gandahar* in France, but has been retitled for American release. It has also been re-adapted: Legendary science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov penned the new American screenplay for *Light Years*. It opens this spring.

Alive Films production for Columbia release.

Felix the Cat. Animated feature, with animation mostly done in Hungary, for New World Pictures release.

The Flash. Movie. First draft script by Jim Strain, from a story by Todd Holland.

The Flintstones. Movie scripted by Steven de Souza. May star Jim Belushi. Joel Silver, producer. *The Flintstone Kids* animated series continues on ABC Saturdays.

Garfield. Animated specials continue, including four half-hours & a one-hour show. Saturday morning series version debuts this fall on CBS (also includes adaptations of Jim Davis' *U.S. Acres*). Theatrical feature, *Garfield's Judgment Day*, also planned.

The Greatest American Hero. An animated version of the cancelled TV series in development at Stephen Cannell Entertainment. Sequel TV film dead. Syndicated TV package now includes the new, failed pilot for the revival.

Green Lantern. Rights nearly acquired by 20th Century Fox. Deal fell through.

Hagar the Horrible. Animated CBS special.

Heavy Metal. *Heavy Metal's Burning Chrome*, movie based on William Gibson story, in works.

He-Man. Animated syndicated series continues. Cannon Films has announced a live-action movie sequel, *Masters of the Universe Part 2*. A TV series spin-off is in development.

The Human Target. TV pilot discussed. Dead.

Iron Man. Movie versions proposed.

The Jetsons. Movie long in development, Paramount. Gary Nardino, producer.

Jonny Quest. Syndicated animated series. Live-action movie to be written & directed by Fred Dekker.

Jon Sable, Freelance. ABC-TV series. Stars Lewis Van Bergen. Cancelled. (see item).

Judge Dredd. Movie. Scripted by Tim Hunter & James Crumley. Hunter will direct.

Lone Wolf & Cub. Another live-action film adaptation. Edward Pressman, producer.

Luke Cage & Iron Fist. Movie in development. Being written by Michael Janover.

Mandrake the Magician. Movie, scripted by William Hjortsberg, in limbo.

Marvin. Half-hour animated CBS TV special.

Mighty Mouse. CBS Saturday animated series, *The New Adventures of Mighty Mouse*. Ralph Bakshi, producer. Animated movie mulled.

Mindmaster. New Jack Kirby comics character created for Empire Entertainment movie.

Mr. Magoo. Movie. Steven Tisch, producer.

Motley's Crew. Sitcom TV pilot in development.

Neil the Horse. Animation/live-action project in development.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD. Movie in development with Paramount. Producers: Debra Hill & Lynn Obst.

Once a Hero. ABC-TV series cancelled.

Peanuts. Animated TV specials continue with four new ones (including a live-action/animation combo).

Plastic Man. Movie.

Popeye. CBS Saturday animated series, *Popeye & Son*. From Hanna-Barbera/King Features.

The Protector. New comics character property developed by Marvel & Warner Bros.

The Punisher. Movie. Boaz Yakin is scripting. Greenlighted

"It was a thrill to see the character walking around," notes *Sable* creator Mike Grell.

Sayonara, "Sable"

Now that ABC-TV's *Sable* series has gone where all good little cancelled shows go, creator Mike Grell and producer Dick Rosetti says that despite some regrets, they're both pretty proud of the short-lived series.

First Comics' *Sable*—the first independent comics creation to be adapted for TV or film—managed to retain a somewhat surprising faithfulness to the comic book, which pleased Grell.

"It was kind of scary to see my own creation on network television," he laughs, "but it was also a thrill to see the character walking around, brought to life. It was really something I had to experience to understand what it was all about.

"Every time they did something stupid, I cringed; every time they made a material change in one of my characters, it made me want to hide my head. But there's only a certain amount of control one can have over a production like that, so the best I could do is hope they would strike it somewhere in the middle of the road, and not mess up too badly!"

Sable was thrown on to ABC's schedule in early November at 8 p.m. Saturdays, which put them at a serious disadvantage.

"If I had it to do over again, I would have taken more time," says Rosetti. "ABC's schedule was in disarray, so they put us on very quickly. I would have much rather premiered in January, which would have given us much more breathing room.

"*Sable* was never intended to be on in the early time slot," he says, noting that the network did air the last episodes an hour later.

"It's *not* a family show. It's an action and suspense piece. We fell in between audiences. We were a little too confusing for teens, but adults thought we were a comic-book show. In fact, Sable removed his battlemask in the last show to appeal to adult audiences; the subsequent episodes would have all taken place without the mask. We needed to be clearer in our presentation of the character."

Rosetti says another problem was that they were thrown onto the schedule very quickly. "We had to start running with the first episode, and never had a chance to tell Sable's background story and show how he came to Chicago. The origin story is exciting and unusual. It helped us sell the show to the network, but we never had a chance to film the African scenes."

The pilot episode was shot several times (the original version cast Gene Simmons of KISS in the lead), and Grell says he was nervous about the version that would air. "I was pleased with the changes they had made, and felt they had made a concerted effort to bring the quality up to the highest standards. I didn't like one of the earlier versions," Grell announces, "but I was really impressed with the changes in characterization, editing and production values in general of the show that was finally broadcast. The second episode more or less bore out my high hopes for what they were going to be able to turn out on a regular basis. I was quite excited about it."

The short run of *Sable* hasn't deterred Rosetti's enthusiasm for dealing with comic-book projects, though he says he doesn't plan to deal with any traditional superheroes.

"*Sable* is unique. *American Flagg!* is unique. When I read those comics, I saw the potential for adult series—no capes or flying men, but something that would appeal to a broad-based *adult* audience," Rosetti says. "Mike Grell is an excellent writer and storyteller, and is creating another TV series for me [*Iron Mike*]. Howard Chaykin is another excellent writer.

"I've sold Chaykin's *American Flagg!* to Larry Gordon Productions for a feature film," Dick Rosetti notes. "We feel it could be the James Bond of the '90s. Flagg is a natural progression from that character; he has no super-powers, but he *does* have tremendous potential."

—*Kim Howard Johnson*

Ken Page, Lewis van Bergen and Rene Russo starred in the illfated *Sable*. "If I had it to do over again, I would have taken more time," says producer Dick Rosetti.

Sable Photos: Copyright 1987 Capital Cities/ABC Inc.

for "go-ahead."

Reid Fleming, World's Toughest Milkman. In development at Warner Bros.

Rock City. Moebius SF musical short story is being expanded for live-action feature. Co-production between Starwatcher Graphics & the Maltese Companies.

The Rocketeer. Creator Dave Stevens is shopping movie project around. Disney is interested. Bill Dear will direct (see article).

Sgt. Rock. Movie to star Arnold Schwarzenegger. David Peoples is scripting. Joel Silver, producer.

The Shadow. Movie. Scripted by Howard Franklin. Martin Bregman, producer.

The She-Hulk. Marvel Productions TV project with Viacom.

The Silver Surfer. Long-announced live action movie dead. Animated mini-series in development at New World.

Spider-Man. Cannon Films version still in development. Scripted by Shepard Goldman. Albert Pyun to direct. Still some question as to who has rights to make movie.

The Spirit. TV movie pilot unsold.

Sub-Mariner. Script by Joe Brancato & Ted Newson.

Superman. Despite critical response to *Superman IV*, Cannon Films has announced a *Superman V* in "pre-production."

Swamp Thing. TV movie, *Return of the Swamp Thing*, for Showtime airing. Michael Uslan & Ben Melnicker, producers.

Tales from the Crypt. Cable series being piloted.

Thor. TV sitcom proposed. Animated series in development.

Tin-Tin. Movie still in development at Amblin Entertainment. Possible title: *Tin-Tin & His Adventures in the Ivory City*.

Watchmen. Movie. Scripted by Sam Hamm. Producer, Joel Silver.

The Wizard of Id. Movie (with songs). Scripted by Steven de Souza, singer/actor Paul Williams & strip creator Johnny Hart

Wolverine. Movie in development. Script treatment by Chris Claremont.

The X-Men. Animated TV series pilot from New World.

Zippyvision. Movie scripted by Bill Griffith & Diane Noomin, featuring Zippy the Pinhead.

Zorro. Live-action half-hour TV series, *Zorro—The Legend Continues*, in preparation co-produced by New World Enterprises & France's Ellipse Programme. Six volumes of Disney's original TV *Zorro* are now available on videocassette.

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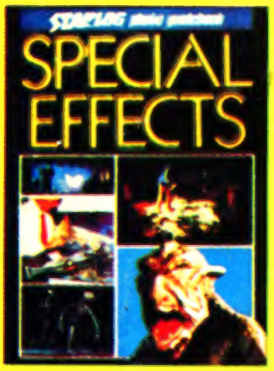

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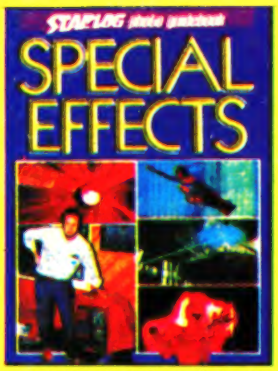

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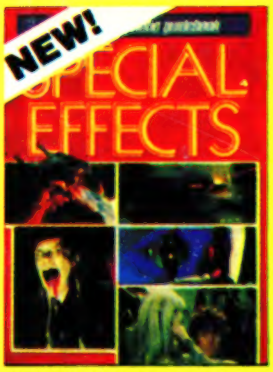

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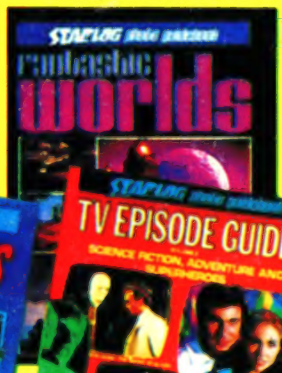

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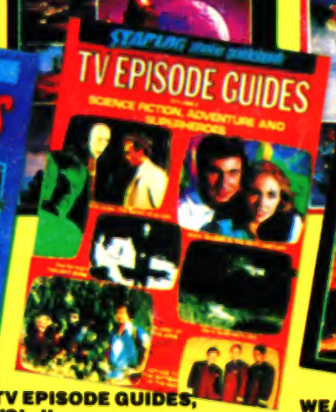

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